Monday, March 30, 2026 No 88 ₹7

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DH

DECCAN HERALD

The Power of Good

Coupons to buy gadgets, expanded breakfast scheme in DMK manifesto

B'luru NGO's science education earns PM praise

Page 5

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Those who seek votes in the name of mandir or masjid are politically, morally and ideologically bankrupt
Political Theatre
For years, the Congress kept borders open for infiltrators and, in their greed for a vote bank, changed the state's demography

DECCAN HERALD
Monday
March 30, 2026

Poll maths

	End of term	Assembly Seats	Gen Seats	SC*	ST*
Assam	May 20	126	98	9	19
Kerala	May 23	140	124	14	2
Tamil Nadu	May 10	234	188	44	2
West Bengal	May 7	294	210	68	16
Puducherry	June 15	30	25	5	0

*reserved

Poll Deployment in 5 States/UT

15 lakh Polling personnel | **8.5 lakh** Security officials | MICRO OBSERVERS **49,000** Polling | **40,000** Counting

Polling Stations

LS 2024 ● Assembly 2026

Assam 28,650 / 31,486

Kerala 25,231 / 30,471

Tamil Nadu 68,321 / 75,032

West Bengal 80,530 / 80,719

Puducherry 967 / 1,099

Meet the leader

Sobha Surendran
BJP
Palakkad

A firebrand leader of the BJP, Sobha Surendran (51) has steadily improved the party's vote share in almost every election she has contested since 2004. She is now contesting from Palakkad, where the BJP finished second in the last three elections, including a bypoll. By fielding a woman candidate, the party hopes to cash in on the series of sexual allegations faced by sitting MLA Rahul Mamkootathil of the Congress.

It was Sobha, who hails from an OBC community, who helped the BJP secure second place in several constituencies, including Palakkad in 2016, by considerably increasing the party's vote share.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, she boosted the BJP's vote share in Alappuzha by 11%. Though she finished third, her performance was seen as a factor in the defeat of sitting MP AM Ariff of the CPM and in paving the way for Congress general secretary KC Venugopal's victory.

Surendran, who got associated with the RSS at a very young age, was even a probable to the party state president post last year. She is now serving as BJP state general secretary.

She has actively participated in several agitations, including the protest against the entry of women in the 10–50 age group into the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple. Surendran has also locked horns with former BJP state president K Surendran, accusing him of attempting to sideline her.

Trivia

The closest election in Kerala's electoral history was decided by a margin of just five votes. In 2001, Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) candidate AA Azeez was declared the winner from Eravipuram in Kollam district by 21 votes. His nearest rival, TA Ahammed Kabeer of the Indian Union Muslim League, approached the Kerala High Court seeking a recount. When the votes were counted again, Azeez managed to retain the seat by a slender margin of just five votes.

BJP changes tack in run-up to polls

Party has learnt its lessons from the failures of the 2021 elections

SUMIT PANDE

Despite no dearth of resources and high-octane rhetoric, the BJP's attempts to conquer Fort William and have its first government in West Bengal have so far fallen well short of the halfway mark in the Assembly.

In 2021, its determined push could only take its tally to 77 seats in the House of 294. In terms of vote share, the BJP polled almost 10 percentage points fewer than the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC).

In the run-up to the 2026 elections, the BJP seems to have learnt from its mistakes and modified its approach.

"Did you see the stage set for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting at Brigade Ground last month? From Dilip Ghosh to Rahul Sinha, only local leaders shared the dais with the PM. Those from outside deputed to manage the elections were sitting in the audience," said a BJP leader who had defected from the TMC.

This is in sharp contrast to the 2021 elections, when the party's then state in-charge and Madhya Pradesh minister Kailash Vijayvargiya was calling the shots. The imprint of joint general secretary Shiv Prakash, the RSS pracharak on deputation to the BJP in ticket selection, was all too apparent.

Not that the BJP has not deputed its central leaders to manage Bengal polls this time as well. Union minister Bhupendra Yadav is in charge and travels to the state every weekend. Bihar minister Mangal Pandey regularly visits localities where migrants from UP and Bihar reside.

Among the national leaders, only Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have attacked the TMC leadership. The objective is to provide little room for Mamata Banerjee to reconstruct an "outsider-vs-local" narrative.

WEST BENGAL
Assembly Poll

Maa, Mati, Manush

BJP leaders have refrained from taking personal swipes at Mamata. Instead, the BJP has sought to attack the TMC on the performance of the 15 years of Banerjee's rule. Union Home Minister Amit Shah last week released a chargesheet against the West Bengal government. However, he was very particular in referring to the TMC leader as Mamata ji or Didi while attacking Banerjee.

"No fish or egg will be available if the BJP comes to power," the West Bengal CM has warned. The TMC has sought to brand the BJP and its leaders "cultural outsiders" to build a narrative around bhadralok-nationalism. From culinary habits to Gods, Banerjee's party has tried to give another twist to the "local-vs-migrant" divide.

BJP workers arrange party flags ahead of the campaigns for Beldanga Assembly constituency on Sunday. PTI

The aggressive and vocal mobilisation in pockets during Ram Navami celebrations in March, some believed, was limited to addressing core right-wing Hindutva elements. Otherwise, unlike the last Assembly polls, "Jai Shree Ram" as a political war cry has been replaced with "Jai Maa Durga", the Goddess firmly entrenched in Bengal's cultural ethos.

Around 125 WB constituencies are Muslim-dominated. The TMC has been consistently winning more than 100 of them, giving it a substantial head start in any electoral battle.

In contrast to the 2021 elections, the BJP is trying to avoid a sharp religious polarisation, which has proved counterproductive in a state with more than 30% Muslim votes. The political rhetoric is euphemised with the use of phrases like "outsiders" and "migrants".

With the Congress and the CPM putting up a half-hearted show, a further consolidation of Muslims votes works to Banerjee's advantage. The only spoilsport could be former TMC minister-turned-rebel Humayun Kabir, who shot to fame by laying the foundation of a Babri Masjid-like mosque.

The cleaning of the electoral rolls in the controversial SIR conducted by the Election Commission is an undetermined factor in this election.

The SIR seems to have impacted the male-female voter ratio in Bengal. In response to a written question in Parliament recently, the Centre admitted a fall in the gender ratio among voters for the first time in more than a decade.

Subject to corrections based on SIR cases under adjudication, the ratio has fallen from 969 to 964 women for every 1,000 men.

Banerjee has assiduously wooed women voters with a slew of schemes entailing direct cash transfer.

Cong releases first list of 284 candidates

NEW DELHI, DHNS: Former MPs Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and Mausam Noor are among 284 candidates chosen by the Congress on Sunday to fight the elections in West Bengal, where the party is fighting alone for the first time in more than 20 years.

Sources said names for the 10 remaining seats will be announced soon for the elections to be held in two phases—April 23 and 29—in West Bengal. The counting of votes will be on May 4.

Chowdhury, who lost to Trinamool Congress' cricketer-politician Yusuf Pathan in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, has been fielded from his stronghold Baharampur, while Noor, a Rajya Sabha MP before quitting TMC recently, will be fielded from Malatipur. Noor was a Congress MP in 2009 and 2014 before joining Trinamool.

The party has fielded Pradip Prasad against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Bhabanipur.

Vijay targets DMK stronghold

Actor chooses Perambur to signal challenge to ruling party

E T B SIVAPRIYAN
CHENNAI, DHNS

TVK chief Vijay

TVK chief C Joseph Vijay has dared to challenge the DMK in its fortress of Chennai, a gamble that even his predecessors in Tinsel-town and politics — the charismatic M G Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa — never took early in their political careers.

M G R shifted from St Thomas Mount on the outskirts of Chennai to distant Aruppukottai when he floated the AIADMK after being expelled from the DMK, and never returned to the state capital. His successor, Jayalalithaa, contested from a city seat only at the tail end of her political career.

However, Vijay wants to confront the ruling party in its citadel — the DMK and its ally, the Congress, won all 16 city seats in 2021 — in his very first election to send the message that he is no pushover.

He may have felt that this was one way to maintain momentum for his party and bolster his narrative that the April 23 electoral contest was primarily between the DMK and the TVK, sidestepping the AIADMK.

That Vijay is contesting from the "safe seat" of Tiruchirappalli (East) — despite the region also being a DMK stronghold, where minorities and youngsters constitute more than half of the total electorate — is a different story altogether.

But that does not dilute the fact that the actor has chosen to contest from Perambur, which borders Kolathur, from where Chief Minister M K Stalin is seeking re-election. The move is likely aimed at creating a ripple effect across the city and the suburbs, where the two-year-old party seems popular, especially among youngsters and women.

For Vijay, Perambur is an interesting and difficult constituency. The DMK has won it in nine of the 16 elections held in independent India, with current MLA R D Sekar, who will challenge the actor, winning by an impressive 54,487 votes in 2021. It is likely to be a bipolar fight between Vijay and Sekar, with the AIADMK allotting the seat to its ally, the PMK, which has little presence there.

TAMIL NADU
Assembly Poll

POLL PROMISES

DMK

1. **Rs 8,000 'Illatharasi' coupon:** One-time voucher for women (non-income tax payees) to buy/replace household appliances
2. **Rs 2,000 monthly support for women:** Doubling financial assistance under the Kalaignar Magalir Urumai Thogai scheme
3. **Free laptops for students:** Distribution of 35 lakh laptops to all college students
4. **Higher farmer support prices:** Paddy at Rs 3,500/quintal and sugarcane at Rs 4,500/tonne
5. **10 Lakh concrete houses:** New homes under Kalaignarin Kanavu Illam scheme toward a hut-free Tamil Nadu by 2030
6. **50 lakh jobs in 5 years:** Rs 8 lakh crore investment target to boost employment and industry

TVK

1. **5 lakh youth jobs (Rs 18,000 stipend):** New "People Service Friend" posts to deliver government services at doorsteps
2. **Unemployment allowance:** Rs 4,000/ month for graduates and Rs 2,500 for diploma holders above 29 years
3. **Rs20 lakh education loans:** Collateral-free loans for higher education up to PhD
4. **Transparent government recruitment law:** New law to ensure fairness in TNPSC, TRB and TNEB hiring
5. **Youth advisory council:** Dedicated body to boost youth participation in governance
6. **Incentives for local jobs:** Tax and electricity concessions for firms hiring 75% local workforce

Modi terms BJP Kerala's A-team, slams Cong & CPM

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

Countering the 'BJP's B-team' allegation raised by the Congress and CPM against each other in Kerala, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the two parties are now acknowledging that the BJP-NDA is the 'A team' in the state.

Addressing an campaign meeting in Palakkad on Sunday, Modi reiterated that the CPM and Congress are "one and the same" and urged people to elect the BJP-NDA to power to bring drastic development to Kerala. He also alleged that successive Congress and CPM-led governments had been "looting" the state for decades.

Modi, who had attacked both the CPM and Congress over the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple gold theft in recent speeches in Kerala, did not make any specific reference to Sabarimala on Sunday. He only said that religious centres would be freed from politics and corruption.

This appears to be part of the BJP's renewed strategy to focus more on development rather than religious issues.

KERALA
Assembly Poll

Modi also conducted a roadshow in nearby Thrissur along with party candidates, wearing traditional Kerala attire and using Malayalam in his speech.

He said the Congress and CPM had launched a new propaganda campaign by accusing each other of being the BJP's B-team. In doing so, he added, they had effectively admitted that the BJP is the A-team in Kerala. Modi alleged that the CPM and Congress are one and the same, as both are part of the I.N.D.I.A bloc at the Centre and in many states.

"The Congress and CPM are only interested in vote-bank politics. They have indulged in corruption and communalism, and had an understanding to alternately loot the state," he alleged.

Accusing Congress leaders of making dangerous statements for political gains that could even put NRIs at risk, the PM said the government was giving top priority to ensuring the safety of scores of NRIs, a large share of them Malayalis, in West Asian countries.

ELECTION BEAT

Artistes perform during a roadshow of West Bengal minister and Trinamool Congress candidate from the Bidhannagar constituency, Sujit Bose, in Kolkata, on Sunday. PTI

Justice for Zubeen, cash for women among 5 Cong promises

GUWAHATI, DHNS: The Opposition Congress in Assam on Sunday announced five "guarantees" ahead of the April 9 Assembly elections, including justice for cultural icon Zubeen Garg and "unconditional" cash transfer to women.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge announced the "guarantees" at a public rally in Lakhimpur district.

The party promised "unconditional" financial assistance of Rs 50,000 to every woman for business, cashless free health insurance of Rs 25 lakh to every family, a monthly pension of Rs 1,250 to every senior citizen, and the conversion of 10 lakh indigenous families' eksonia land (yearly allotment) into myadi patta (permanent allotment).

He also promised that the Congress would provide justice to Garg within 100 days of government formation.

The Congress' cash transfer promise apparently aims to counter similar schemes implemented by the BJP-led government since 2016. The BJP government has been providing Rs 1,250 monthly to nearly 40 lakh eligible women and Rs 10,000 as initial financial assistance to women members of self-help groups.

Kharge called Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma a "betrayer" of former CMs, the Congress' Tarun Gogoi and the BJP's Sarbananda Sonowal.

CITIZENSHIP WOES

CAA sparks anxiety among Hindu Bengalis in Assam

FROM THE GROUND

SUMIR KARMAKAR
CACHAR (ASSAM), DHNS

PAPERS & HURDLES

- CAA passed in 2019 to grant citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan
- CAA demand strong among Hindu Bengalis, BJP vote bank
- But most Hindu Bengalis claim pre-1971 roots, avoid CAA
- CAA applicants struggle to prove Bangladeshi origin

The 'Certificate of Naturalisation' that Depali Das received from the Assam government on March 6 not only ended her long struggle to shed the tag of being an "infiltrator" from Bangladesh but also restored her political rights and privileges as an Indian citizen. Yet the 60-year-old member of the Hindu Bengali community appeared tense at her home in Lalchora — a settlement inside Khulichera forest village in South Assam's Cachar district, which shares its boundary with Mizoram's Kolasib district.

Pointing to her husband, Abhimanyu Das, she said he lost his mental balance during the two years she was lodged in a foreigner detention camp between 2019 and 2021.

Depali, who ran a tea and snacks stall in nearby Dholai town, was summoned to a police station and subsequently confined in the detention camp inside Silchar jail. "I can't sleep as he wanders out of the house at night. I am also worried about the debts we incurred during the legal battle," she told *DH*. Authorities had alleged she was from Bangladesh's Sylhet district, which borders Cachar.

She was released on bail in 2021 following a Supreme Court order. With no respite in sight, the family filed an application for citizenship at the end of 2024 under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), passed by the Narendra Modi government in December 2019 to grant citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who fled due to "religious persecution".

ASSAM
Assembly Poll

The certificate has not eased the worries of Dipali's son and five daughters either. They fear that reports of their mother obtaining citizenship under the CAA could stigmatise them as Bangladeshis in the rest of Assam.

Assam had witnessed a strong anti-CAA agitation, during which five people were killed in police firing. Assamese and other indigenous communities fear that granting citizenship to post-1971 migrants would reduce them to a minority.

There is, however, strong demand for the implementation of the CAA, particularly from Hindu Bengalis, a key vote bank for the BJP.

Barak Valley, comprising Cachar, Shri Bhumi (formerly Karimganj) and Hailakandi, is predominantly Bengali. Nearly 10 lakh Hindus were excluded from the NRC (with its 1971 cut-off), but Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said last year that most Hindu Bengalis are unwilling to apply for citizenship under the CAA. According to him, they claim they are pre-1971 residents.

Dharmananda Deb, a lawyer who provided free legal aid to Depali, told *DH* that applicants seeking citizenship under the CAA face difficulties in submitting documents to prove they were Bangladeshi citizens. "How can we expect someone who fled persecution to provide such papers? People escaped with their lives, without any belongings."

"Bengalis are tagged as Bangladeshis just because of the language. If the government truly wants to resolve the citizenship crisis of Hindu Bengalis, all these conditions must be removed," said Sanjib Deb Laskar, chief of the Barak Valley Banga Sahitya Sanskriti Sammelan, a Silchar-based literary body.

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The Power of Good

Amid suspense, Nitish may quit as MLC today

Must quit state legislature within 14 days of being elected as MP

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Sports

Teen Antonelli wins Japanese Grand Prix for 2nd straight victory P.12

Business

Voice AI: Boon of real-time hands-free interaction P.10

World

'Top Gun' actor James Tolkan dead P.9

State

4,900 police vacancies filled: CM P.3

Fear of ground ops looms as war enters 2nd month

Iran warns US troops entering country will be 'set on fire'

TEHRAN/DUBAI, AGENCIES

A top Iranian official warned the US against a ground invasion, saying American troops would be set "on fire", as regional diplomats gathered in Pakistan on Sunday in a push to broker an end to the month-long war.

Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, accused the US of plotting a ground attack despite publicly pushing for a negotiated deal, after a US warship with around 3,500 military personnel arrived in West Asia.

"The enemy publicly sends messages of negotiation and dialogue while secretly planning a ground attack," Ghalibaf said in a statement carried by the official IRNA news agency.

"Our men are waiting for the arrival of the American soldiers on the ground to set them on fire and punish their regional allies once and for all," he added.

The Washington Post reported the Pentagon was preparing plans for weeks of ground operations — potentially including raids on sites near the Strait of Hormuz — though US President Donald Trump has yet to approve any deployment.

Trump has repeatedly spoken of diplomatic contacts with Iran, although these claims have been denied by Tehran.

The war has escalated into a regional conflagration as Iran has retaliated with attacks on Gulf Arab states, affecting shipping and threatening world economy.

▸ Iran, Page 4

Lanka thanks PM Modi for fuel shipment, Page 9

LATEST FROM WEST ASIA

- Iran's navy chief Shahram Irani says USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier will be targeted if it comes within range
- Electricity cut in parts of Iranian capital Tehran and in Alborz province after attacks on infrastructure
- US-Israeli strikes hit Iranian port city of Bandar Khamir near Strait of Hormuz, killing five people
- Israeli industrial complex in Negev desert hit by missile sharpnel

A destroyed US Air Force AWACS aircraft lying at Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia after a missile strike last week. AFP

- Israeli army announces death in combat of a soldier in south Lebanon, the fifth in Lebanon since March 2
- Iran fires missiles and drones at plants belonging to two of world's largest aluminium producers in Bahrain and UAE
- Two more Indian-flagged LPG tankers pass through Strait of Hormuz
- Kuwait army says its 10 personnel injured in missile attack on a military camp

Houthis launch second attack

Yemen's Houthis carried out a second attack on Israel in less than 24 hours using missiles and drones, and vowed to continue military operations in the coming days, the Iran-backed group's military spokesperson Yahya Saree said.

Hormuz in focus during Pak talks

Pakistan hosted talks with Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia on Sunday (in picture) as part of its efforts to broker an end to the Iran war, with initial discussions focused on proposals to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The proposals included Suez Canal-style fee structures, Reuters reported citing sources. Later, Pakistan Foreign Minister indicated the prospect of talks between the US and Iran to de-escalate the war, underlining that both countries have expressed their "confidence" in Islamabad to facilitate their talks. Page 9

PARTY'S OPTIONS

- If party asks Siddaramaiah to step down, his loyalists will be inducted into the Cabinet and he will get a senior position in the party
- If Siddaramaiah is allowed to continue for the remaining two years of his term, then Shivakumar's followers would get preference in the Cabinet reshuffle
- To placate Shivakumar, party may assure him that he would be made CM if Congress comes to power in 2028
- If Siddaramaiah is removed, his successor, whether its is Shivakumar or someone else, will be decided by Rahul Gandhi

Rahul to call CM, DKS to Delhi in May

Cong aims to put lid on festering power tussle in state

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Congress leadership plans to settle the festering power tussle in Karnataka by inviting Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy D K Shivakumar to Delhi for discussions with Rahul Gandhi sometime in the middle of May.

Sources told *DH* that Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, recently discussed the matter with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and other leaders, and it was decided that the CM and Dy CM would be called to Delhi after the five-state elections.

Leaders involved in discussions have sought to impress upon the Congress high command to resolve the issue without further delay.

Though Rahul had initially planned to call both leaders to Delhi in early March, the meeting was postponed as the Congress leadership got busy with electioneering and the Budget session of Parliament.

Among the senior leaders, Karnataka warhorse Kharge seems to be of the view that confusion on leadership change needs to end soon to give more clarity to state leaders and party workers who would now be gearing up for the next Assembly polls.

The party wants to end the confusion before the local body polls, sources said.

The party high command has two broad options. "If the party asks Siddaramaiah to step down, more of his loyalists will be inducted into the Cabinet and he will be rewarded with a senior position in the party. If the party allows Siddaramaiah to continue, then Shivakumar's followers will get preference in the reshuffle.

"To placate Shivakumar, the party may assure him that he would be made CM if the Congress comes to power in the 2028 Assembly polls," a top party leader told *DH*.

If Siddaramaiah is removed, his successor, whether its is D K Shivakumar or someone else, will be decided by Rahul Gandhi, sources added.

Siddaramaiah has already told the party top brass that, in the event of his removal, he would prefer to back Dalit leader and Home Minister G Parameshwara as the next chief minister.

4 children drown in Yadgir farm pond

YADGIR, DHNS: Four children drowned after entering a farm pond to swim in this district on Sunday, the police said.

The incident occurred in Naganur village in Surapura taluk, under the jurisdiction of the Kembhavi police station. The deceased were identified as Kirana (6), Basamma (11), Sharath (6) and Hanumesh (7), police said. According to the police, the children had gone to the pond as it was a school holiday.

Details on Page 4

LS to discuss end of Naxalism ahead of March 31 deadline

NEW DELHI, DHNS

With the government's deadline for eliminating Naxalism ending March 31, the Lok Sabha will discuss 'efforts to free the country from left-wing extremism' on Monday.

The government has listed the discussion under Rule 193 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha, where there is no need for a formal motion or voting.

The notice for the discussion was given by TDP MP Byreddy Shabari and Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde and will initiate debate, in which Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to provide an overview of the efforts to eliminate Naxalism.

Last month, the MHA had said that the number of Naxal-affected districts in the country has come down to seven, with three of them — Bijapur, Narayanpur and Sukma in Chhattisgarh — remaining in the "most-affected category".

The MHA also said that 7,409 Naxals were arrested between 2019 and January 15, 2026. Another 5,880 naxals surrendered during the period. Almost the entire CPI (Maoist) leadership has been killed or has surrendered in the past couple of years, it added.

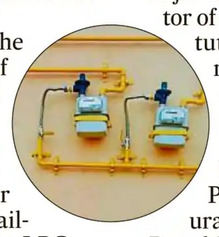
Between 2004 and March 26 this year, 16,496 Naxals have surrendered, with a maximum of 2,337 laying down arms last year.

The Union government is preparing an "operations and development" blueprint, which includes an announcement for the withdrawal of approximately five Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) battalions from Naxal-infested regions and the launch of multiple welfare schemes.

PNG users cooking on LPG stoves pay for 25% of gas they never used

CHIRANJEEVI KULKARNI
BENGALURU, DHNS

Piped Natural Gas (PNG) consumers who retrofitted their old LPG stoves are losing around 25% of the fuel charged on their bills, simply because their old stove is not equipped for the combustion of new gas.



On March 24, the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas notified a new rule stating that households not opting for PNG despite availability will not get LPG after three months. The rule comes in the wake of a shortage of LPG — 60% of which is imported compared to 50% import of PNG — amid the ongoing West Asia war.

Many consumers switching over to PNG are unwittingly losing around 25% of the gas due to retrofitting of their old LPG stoves by modifying the nozzle and burner. However, these stoves, which are designed for the denser LPG that flows at a higher pressure, cannot efficiently burn PNG. The piped gas requires a different burner due to its low-pressure flow.

Anjan Ray, a former director of CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum, noted that in view of the wastage of gas established by a study conducted by the institute, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) has made it mandatory for the piped gas suppliers to install PNG stoves.

"The companies are not interested as they can sell 25% more gas by allowing retrofitting. Consumers continue to pay 25% more for the gas they never used," he noted.

▸ PNG, Page 4

'NO KINGS' RALLY

Demonstrators gather for the "No Kings" protest outside the State Capitol building in Minnesota, US, as part of a nationwide agitation against the Trump administration. AFP

FCRA Bill allows places of worship takeover

NEW DELHI, DHNS: A bill seeking to amend the law on foreign funds proposes to take over places of worship built or renovated using donations from abroad if it loses the licence for collecting such funds.

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill 2026, however, does not allow changing the "religious character" of such places while entrusting its management to a person whose terms and conditions will be determined later.

The Bill proposes to take over any asset created using foreign funds if an entity allowed to collect such donations gets the licence cancelled.

Details on Page 5

Quickly

Murder-suicide pact claims 2 lives in Anekal

In a suspected murder-suicide pact driven by debt distress, a chit fund businessman allegedly slit the throat of his mother, sister and nephew before attempting to take his own life in a similar manner. The incident was reported in Bidaraguppe gram panchayat limits of Anekal taluk around 10 pm on Saturday. While two of them died, two were in coma.

Details on Page 4

60% flight seats without addl charges from Apr 20

Airlines will start offering at least 60% of seats in a flight without levying any additional charge from April 20, as well as maintain a transparent seat allocation policy, according to aviation watchdog DGCA. In this regard, the DGCA issued the amended Air Transport Circular on March 20 and it would come into effect from April 20.

3 soldiers injured after weapon goes off accidentally

Three soldiers were injured after a service weapon allegedly went off inside an army camp in north Kashmir's Kupwara district, officials said on Sunday, with the army ruling out fratricide and ordering an internal inquiry into the incident.

Details on Page 8

Telangana passes Bill to uphold dignity of senior citizens

The Telangana Assembly on Sunday passed the 'Telangana Employees Accountability and Monitoring of Parental Support Bill, 2026,' aimed at ensuring dignity for senior citizens. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said the Bill seeks to go beyond existing central legislation. He noted that the country already has a national law, the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.

North Korea conducts engine test for missile

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed a test of an upgraded, high-thrust, solid-fuel engine for weapons and hailed it as a significant development to boost the country's strategic military capability, state media reported Sunday.

Details on Page 9

COEXISTENCE

Living with 'foxy' neighbours in Haveri and Gadag

PAVAN KUMAR H
HUBBALLI, DHNS

At a time when foxes, wolves, jackals and hyenas are losing their habitat across the state as land is being converted into farmlands, two farmers from Haveri and Gadag have allowed the animals to use their farmlands to rear their young.

A wildlife enthusiast in Haveri's Ranebennur, Chandru Shidenur, left his one-acre farmland untilled from November after a fox pair chose the field to rear their young.

Shidenur, who has a land next to the Ranebennur Blackbuck Sanctuary, decided not to cultivate the plot in order to avoid disturbing the animals. Millet and vegetable cultivation are the main sources of income for him.

A fox guards her den in Ranebennur.
PHOTO BY CHANDRU SHIDENUR

Within a few days of the fox pair giving birth to three pups, Chandru received another surprise.

A pair of jackals had also littered four pups at the other end of the same field.

"The past three months have been fascinating. I am able to observe and understand the behaviour of foxes and jackals from close quarters," said Chandru.

Chandru said one of the three fox pups was not cared for by the mother and as a result it died.

He also observed an interesting interaction between species.

"Foxes and jungle cats seem to share a unique bond. Together, they appear to be ensuring that the jackal pair does not approach the fox den," he said.

Regular observation of the burrows has helped him better understand the animals' behaviour, their prey base, and the role they play as predators in the ecosystem.

"The presence of foxes and jackals is actually beneficial as they help keep pigs and other herbivores away," he said. While leaving the land uncultivated has caused financial losses, Chandru says the presence of wildlife partly compensates for it.

▸ Living with fox, Page 4

The sudden showers caught many weekend commuters off guard on Sunday evening. DH PHOTO/ASHWIN BM

Thundershowers cool Bengaluru; rain nearly doubles March average

BENGALURU, DHNS

After a torrid start to the week, Bengalureans finally found some respite as moderate rainfall and thundershowers lashed many parts of the city on Sunday evening.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a partly cloudy sky with one or two spells of rain or thundershowers for Monday.

Late Sunday evening, many parts of the city received persistent spells of moderate rainfall or thundershowers accompanied by hail and gusty winds travelling at 40-50 kmph.

The rains caused temporary power outages and traffic snarls in many areas.

Tree branches fell in at least two places—near the Srinagar bus stop and in a residential area in New Thippasandra, according to the GBA control room.

By 8.30 pm, the IMD's Bengaluru City observatory recorded 16.0 mm of rainfall, while HAL Airport registered 2.9 mm. The Automatic Weather Station (AWS) in Bengaluru Urban recorded 16.5 mm, while Doddaballapura in Bengaluru Rural recorded 1.0 mm.

So far this month, Bengaluru City has received 27.2 mm of rainfall — nearly double the average for March (14.7 mm) — HAL Airport 9 mm (March average is 11.2 mm), Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) 94.4 mm, and GKVK 38.2 mm.

The sudden showers brought down temperatures, but caught many weekend commuters off guard, leading to minor waterlogging in several low-lying pockets.

After staying above normal for days, the maximum temperature fell slightly.

According to IMD data, the maximum temperature was 33.6°C (0.6°C lower) in Bengaluru City and 33.6°C (0.8°C) at the Kempegowda International Airport. At HAL airport, it was 34°C, slightly above the normal of 33.8°C.

Two-day forecast

For the next 48 hours, the city is expected to witness a partly cloudy sky with rain or thundershowers likely occurring towards the evening or night.

Despite the showers, the maximum temperature is expected to hover around 35°C, with the minimum settling at 21°C.

While Coastal and North Interior Karnataka remained dry on Sunday, the moisture-laden winds over South Interior Karnataka are expected to keep the mercury in check as the state enters the first week of April.

Tree topples, damages power poles

A large tree fell onto a row of electricity poles in front of the SBI Bank in Bhuvaneshwari Nagar, Dasarahalli, following heavy rain and strong winds, damaging three poles.

Bescom staff arrived at the scene and disconnected the power supply, according to a local shopkeeper.

Forest officials deployed a JCB machine to clear the uprooted tree.

A large tree fell in Bhuvaneshwari Nagar due to strong winds and rain. DH PHOTO

सत्यमेव जयते

AIRPORTS ECONOMIC REGULATORY AUTHORITY OF INDIA (AERA)

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

3rd Floor, Udaan Bhawan, Safdarjung Airport, New Delhi – 110003 Ph.: 011-24695044

PUBLIC NOTICE

STAKEHOLDERS' CONSULTATION MEETING ON DETERMINATION OF TARIFF FOR THE AERONAUTICAL SERVICES FOR NAVI MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, NAVI MUMBAI FOR THE FIRST CONTROL PERIOD (01.04.2025 – 31.03.2030)

Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (AERA) has issued Consultation Paper No.08/2025-26 on 17.03.2026 (which is available on AERA website at URL www.aera.gov.in) w.r.t the Tariff Determination for Aeronautical Services for Navi Mumbai International Airport, Navi Mumbai for the First Control Period (01.04.2025 – 31.03.2030).

In accordance with the provision of Section 13(4) of the AERA Act, 2008, the various tariff proposals of the Authority contained in the Consultation Paper, are put forth for Stakeholders' Consultation. A Stakeholders Consultation Meeting in hybrid mode (Physical/Online) in this regard is scheduled on **02nd April, 2026 (Thursday) at 3:00 PM at:**

Stakeholders Room, 3rd Floor, Udaan Bhawan, Safdarjung Airport, New Delhi – 110003

All stakeholders like Passengers/Passengers' Associations, General Public, Airport Operators, Airlines, Industry Associations/Bodies, Independent Service providers for Cargo, Ground Handing Fuel Farm etc., are requested to join the said meeting and give their valuable suggestions/comments/views on the aforesaid Consultation Paper on tariff proposal of Navi Mumbai International Airport.

Participants joining in person may send their confirmation to AERA by 01st April, 2026 with Name, email address, mobile number, vehicle number by email (to director-ps@aera.gov.in and rajan.gupta1@aera.gov.in). Online link will be shared on AERA website (https://aera.gov.in) before the Stakeholders meeting under Tab "News and Announcements".

Sd/-
Secretary, AERA

CBC 03112/12/0028/2526

City sees 20% rise in GI issues amid rising temperatures

Doctors link surge to heat, dehydration & food safety concerns

AMULLYA SHIVASHANKAR
BENGALURU, DHNS

Doctors in Bengaluru are reporting a 20% rise in gastrointestinal issues among children and adults, with some linking the trend to rising temperatures in the city.

Dr Girish P Veeranna, Consultant, Medical Gastroenterology and Hepatology, said, "Seasonal weather changes are contributing to the spread of gastroenteritis among children. Seasonal changes often create favourable conditions for viral and bacterial infections affecting the gut."

He added that with Bengaluru witnessing a rise in gut-related illnesses, greater awareness around food safety and hydration is essential, particularly for young children who are at the highest risk.

Explaining why children are at higher risk, Dr Anupama NK, Senior Consultant, Medical Gastroenterology, said, "There is a noticeable rise in gastroenteritis cases among children, especially those between two and five years. This is mainly due to their developing immune systems and increased exposure to germs in places like schools, daycare centres, and playgrounds."

Symptoms such as diarrhoea, stomach pain and dehydration are commonly reported by patients, doctors said.

At a glance

In children

- Mostly gastroenteritis cases. Mild cases treated with ORS and fluids.
- Severe warning signs are low urination, irritability, reduced activity, pale skin/tongue.
- Seek immediate medical attention in severe cases.

In adults

- Increase in piles, fissures, abscesses.
- Main causes are dehydration, low fibre intake, irregular eating habits.

Dr Nitin M, Consultant Pediatric and Neonatologist, said, "Mild cases are treated with ORS or similar drinks. If the frequency of symptoms increases and there is less urination, we usually administer glucose and suggest ORS.

In severe cases, children are irritable, not consuming anything, have decreased activity, and their skin and tongue look pale. In such cases, the parents or caregivers should immediately consult a doctor."

In adults, anorectal conditions such as piles, fissures and abscesses have also risen, doctors said.

Dr CM Parameshwara, CEO and founder of a gastroenterology institute in Bengaluru, said: "In the last two weeks, one clear trend is the rise in anorectal conditions such as piles, fissures and abscesses, largely driven by summer-related dehydration. When fluid intake drops, stools become harder, leading to straining and increasing the risk of these conditions. Irregular eating habits and low fibre intake aggravate the problem."

He continued: "Separately, we are also seeing a noticeable increase in gastroenteritis cases during this period. At temperatures above 30°C, bacteria such as E. coli and Salmonella multiply rapidly in cooked food if it is left unrefrigerated.

Preventive care is simple but critical. Staying well hydrated, eating freshly prepared food, maintaining regular meal timings and ensuring adequate fibre intake can keep these problems at bay."

Civic bodies bet on new revenues to cover spending

Target Rs 4,400 cr from FAR, single-plot approvals & khata

NAVEEN MENEZES
BENGALURU, DHNS

Bengaluru's five newly formed municipal corporations have projected over Rs 4,400 crore in fresh revenue for the upcoming financial year, relying on a mix of schemes such as Floor Area Ratio (FAR) relaxations, single-plot approvals, and khata regularisation.

This indicates that authorities, in their bid to widen revenue sources, are banking heavily on mechanisms that are either untested or have shown weak traction so far.

The combined outlay of all five corporations for 2026–27 is pegged at Rs 20,217 crore, marking about a 1% increase over the current year.

According to budget documents, the five corporations together expect to raise Rs 2,110 crore from premium FAR — a scheme that allows developers to purchase up to 40% additional FAR by paying 28% of the guidance value as a fee. While the target appears ambitious, town planning officials are confident of achieving it, citing an uptick in Bengaluru's real estate market.

In the three months since the premium FAR policy came into force, the Bengaluru Central City Corporation has raised Rs 30 crore, while the West Corporation has generated Rs 39.73 crore. Other corporations are yet to see traction, even as the East Corporation expects to generate the highest revenue under this policy.

Officials are also banking on a new scheme that allows conversion of 'B' khata to 'A' khata, provided property owners pay 5% of the guidance value as regularisation charges. All five corporations together expect to generate over Rs 1,700 crore from this, with the North (Rs 680 crore) and West (Rs 563 crore) corporations projecting the largest shares.

However, data from 2025–26 paints a more modest, though promising, picture.

So far, the five corporations have received 9,452 applications. Of these, about 2,489 have been approved, but only around 350 property owners have made payments, totalling roughly Rs 17 crore. Officials believe the scheme will gain traction in the coming months, noting that Bengaluru has over 7.5 lakh 'B' khata properties.

Single-plot approval is the third new policy, enabling city corporations to approve plots of up to 10,000 sqm that have been converted for non-agricultural use, but are not part of layouts formed or approved by the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA). This approval allows property owners to obtain 'A' khata by paying 5% of the guidance value.

All five corporations have projected revenue of Rs 614 crore from this scheme in 2026–27, even though none has generated any revenue from it in the current financial year. Officials said procedural delays, lack of clarity, and low initial uptake have stalled collections, but they are hopeful of a turnaround.

The aggressive revenue projections, however, carry significant risks.

Revenue projected in 2026-27

Corpns	Premium FAR	Single-plot approval	Khata regularisation (B to A)
Central	Rs 350 cr	Rs 75 lakh	Rs 7.5 cr
East	Rs 600 cr	Rs 139 cr	Rs 225 cr
West	Rs 380 cr	Rs 200 cr	Rs 563 cr
North	Rs 420 cr	Rs 100 cr	Rs 680 cr
South	Rs 360 cr	Rs 175 cr	Rs 225 cr
Total	**Rs 2,110 cr**	**Rs 614.75 cr**	**Rs 1,700.5 cr**

SOURCE: BUDGET DOCUMENTS

Overestimated budget risks delays, dues

A government source warned that corporations could face difficulties meeting operational expenses, if collections fall short.

"The two-year delay in clearing contractors' bills has not reduced even by a month, despite senior bureaucrats presenting budgets over the last five years. Overestimating revenue could lead to more stalled projects, mounting liabilities, and further delays in payments," the source said, adding that corporations should ideally have dropped several non-essential works to make the budget more realistic.

NGO flags gaps in city budget, seeks transparency

BENGALURU, DHNS

Reacting to the city's municipal budget, NGO Janaagraha has urged the five corporations to provide real-time access to expenditure at the street and neighbourhood levels.

"We need a significantly better imagination of budgeting for the city. There is a need for the state government, Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), and new municipal corporations to prove themselves to the citizens that they are serious about breaking the status quo of poor governance in the city. That can only come from radical transparency in civic works and spending at the first mile," said Srikanth Viswanathan, CEO of Janaagraha.

Analysing the budget, the NGO said development work expenditure accounts for the largest share across corporations, but drops in North (41%) and South (47%) compared to East (62%) and Central (63%).

"The North Corporation stands out for higher establishment and programme spending — with 17% on establishment and 11% on programme expenses," the press note stated. "Bengaluru North has the largest overall social welfare budget at Rs 289 crore."

It also noted that East and Central corporations rely heavily on tax revenues, while North and West depend more on non-tax revenues. "State grants are compensating for weaker own revenues in some corporations. North (23%) and West (31%) rely on Government of Karnataka capital grants, compared to just 10% in East. This reflects their lower capacity to generate tax revenues (18% in North and 17% in West Vs 24% in East)."

In effect, Janaagraha said the city generates roughly Rs 55 out of every Rs 100 it spends from its own sources.

Metro clears 22,000 post-IPL riders with 39 trips at 3-min gap

BENGALURU, DHNS: Over 22,000 IPL fans travelled by metro for the opening match on Saturday, more than double the usual crowd, according to Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL).

In coordination with the Bengaluru police, the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA), and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), the BMRCL implemented an innovative metro-match ticket integration model for the matches at M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Match tickets integrated with metro QR codes enable spectators to travel for free from any metro station to the Cubbon Park or MG Road metro stations and return after the match without separate ticketing.

Th BMRCL said that after the match, over 22,000 passengers were cleared within 50 minutes (from 11.05 pm to 11.55 pm), with trains running every three minutes. During this period, the Cubbon Park metro station operated 13 trains toward Majestic and nine toward Whitefield.

A total of 39 round trips were operated — 18 on the Purple Line, 15 on the Green Line and 6 on the Yellow Line — to clear the post-match crowd. The last trains departed from Majestic at 1.45 am, while the last train from RV Road departed at 2.05 am, it added.

Vehicle parking was available at 44 metro stations at Rs 30 for two-wheelers and Rs 60 for four-wheelers.

The BMRCL said it would add facilities for upcoming IPL matches to strengthen post-match crowd management and ensure smoother, more efficient spectator movement toward metro stations.

Purple Line delayed

BENGALURU, DHNS: Metro train services on the Purple Line began 45 minutes late between Garudacharpalya and MG Road on Sunday due to maintenance work.

According to Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL), train services on the route began at 7.45 am instead of the usual start time of 7 am.

Train services on other sections of the Purple Line, as well as on the Green and Yellow lines, began and operated as normally, it added.

SALUTING LEGENDS

Planetarium honours two scientific giants

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium (JNP) hosted a commemorative event on Sunday to honour Prof UR Rao and Prof CV Vishveshwara.

The event drew students and science enthusiasts, featuring public talks, video screenings and a sky theatre show on their contributions to India's scientific growth.

JNP Director BR Guruprasad delivered a lecture on Rao, describing him as the "Architect of the Indian Satellite Programme".

He spoke about Rao's leadership in India's first satellite, Aryabhata. Guruprasad said the success of missions such as Chandrayaan 3, Mangalyaan, and Aditya L1 stems from the foundation laid by Rao.

"Today, nearly 50 satellites circle the earth, working for India in communication, navigation and weather monitoring, serving as our economic infrastructure. Prof Rao ensured the sustenance and growth of this programme, mastering solid, liquid, and cryogenic technologies along the way," he added.

JNP Director BR Guruprasad delivers a talk at the planetarium on Sunday. PHOTO: JNP

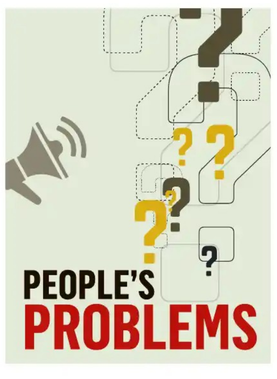
Following this, science communicator BS Shylaja spoke on Prof Vishveshwara's ability to connect science with the arts.

Known for his wit and jovial nature, Vishveshwara made astronomy accessible to the public through cartoons and lectures.

The highlight of the event was the screening of 'Celestial Fireworks', a sky show scripted by Vishveshwara. It explored cosmic events such as supernova, black holes, and comet impacts, explaining complex ideas in an engaging manner.

Workshops from April 7

The planetarium also announced that its summer science programmes for school students (Classes 3 to 10) will begin on April 7. These workshops aim to foster scientific temper through non-formal education, continuing the legacy of the two scientists.



Need a hand? Write to us

Letters of grievances are pouring in and we are doing our best to accommodate as many as possible. Readers may write in to highlight civic problems affecting their locality and we will help address them in an interactive and effective manner.

Grievances and issues related to public utility agencies such as Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (Bescom) would be highlighted in the weekly column.

The writeups, which could be accompanied by photographs highlighting the problems, will be published on Mondays. Mail your grievances to: peoplesproblems @deccanherald.co.in

Run BMTC buses from Byadarahalli

Sunkadakatte localities need better transit.

Byadarahalli, Anjana Nagar, Bharat Nagar, and BEL Layout — all located near Sunkadakatte on Magadi Road — have witnessed tremendous growth in recent years. Thousands of houses and apartment complexes have been constructed, and many more are coming up. These areas are also home to several schools and colleges.

However, it is surprising that there are no direct BMTC bus services from Byadarahalli and Anjana Nagar to Kempegowda Bus Station or KR Market. Buses passing through from other areas remain overcrowded throughout the day.

This creates significant inconvenience for commuters, especially the elderly, women, children, and persons with disabilities. Additionally, the metro project in this area has not yet begun.

We request BMTC officials, who have been taking several passenger-friendly initiatives, to kindly look into this issue and introduce direct bus services from Byadarahalli, particularly during peak school, college, and office hours.

BN Bharath,
Bairegowda Layout,
Bharat Nagar

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

GENERAL

Birth Anniversary: Bhagwan Mahavir Janma Kalyana Mahotsava; Bhuvan Keerthi Bhattaraka Swamiji, BR Divyakumar, D Sudhakar to attend; Karnataka Jain Association; Rajarshi Dr D Veerendra Heggade Sabha Bhavan, Karnataka Jain Bhavan, KR Road; 2.30 pm.

IMahavir Jayanti: Siddaramaiah, DK Shivakumar to attend; Organised by Department of Kannada and Culture; Ravindra Kalakshetra, JC Road; 6 pm.

CULTURAL

World Theatre Day: Anantharaju, Prasannakumar to attend; Organised by Kushala Kalavrunda; Samsa Bayalu Rangamandira, Ravindra Kalakshetra, JC Road; 4 pm.

RELIGIOUS

Karaga Shaktyotsava: Dharmaraya Swamy Temple premises, Thigalarpet; 12.30 pm.

Music Festival: Ramanavami Sangeethotsava; Fort High School, Chamarajpet; 5 pm.

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST

Partly cloudy sky with one or two spells of rain or thundershowers

TEMPERATURES

Maximum	34.0°C
Minimum	21.0°C
Rainfall (as of 8:30 am)	2.0 mm
Humidity (as of 5:30 pm)	39%
Sunset (Mar 30)	6:31 pm
Sunrise (Mar 31)	6:18 am
Moonrise	3:29 pm
Moonset	3:34 am

(Relevant data recorded at 5.30 pm) Source: IMD

Police plaint against cabbie for 'insulting' Kannada

BENGALURU, DHNS: A police complaint has been filed against a cab driver for insulting the Kannada language.

The complaint was filed on March 27 by anchor and folk music artiste Divya Alur.

Divya stated in her complaint that the driver she booked on Rapido had "mocked her for speaking in Kannada, while also belittling Kannada speakers".

"There is no need to speak Kannada in Bengaluru. Speak Hindi, the national language," Divya quoted the driver as saying in her complaint.

She also accused the driver of using a mobile phone during the ride. She recorded the incident and shared it on her social media handle.

Girinagar police have acknowledged the complaint and will initiate further action after verifying the allegations, sources said.

Transport dept cracks down on 450 out-of-state vehicles

'They account for 3,207 cases, Rs 41.4 cr in tax dues'

ASRA MAVAD
BENGALURU, DHNS

The transport department has seized 450 out-of-state-registered cars and registered 3,207 cases for non-payment of taxes between April 2025 and March 2026.

Overall, Rs 41.4 crore in taxes and Rs 68.6 lakh in fines were collected from these cases, totalling Rs 42.1 crore, as per data shared by the department.

Over the past year, the department conducted routine checks on 20,875 cars.

"We've been doing routine checks, as there is a constant number of out-of-state registered vehicles in the state at all times. We get many new registrations from Puducherry and second-hand vehicles from Delhi. Also, commonly, people who move into the city for education tend to settle here, but don't get their vehicles re-registered in the state," said M P Omkareshwari, additional commissioner for transport (enforcement south).

The recent case of a white Lamborghini drifting in the middle of the CBD area again highlighted the growing number of out-of-state-registered vehicles in the city.

The Lamborghini car which had been seized for traffic violations and reckless driving near Anil Kumble Circle.
DH FILE PHOTO

To crack down on such vehicles, the transport department is planning special drives in April, added Omkareshwari.

Of the 3,207 cases registered, the regional transport office (RTO) in south Bengaluru saw the highest number at 432, followed by east Bengaluru at 413 and K R Puram at 385. The RTO in Yelahanka saw the lowest amount of cases at 145, and west Bengaluru 149.

The highest amount of taxes, at Rs 3.7 crore, were collected at central Bengaluru RTO, and the lowest amount of Rs 11 lakh was collected at Jnanabharathi RTO.

Delhi's 2nd-hand vehicles

"While many luxury cars are coming into the state with non-Karnataka registrations to evade taxes, these do not make up a majority of the cases booked. The 10-15-year cap on petrol and diesel vehicles in Delhi is pushing a lot of second-hand vehicles into the state. When these vehicles are caught, they often lie that they're just visiting the city for medical purposes or some other reason. We need to be able to prove that these cars have been plying in Karnataka for over a year, to be able to tax or fine them," she said.

Priyank Kharge.

Digging temple brings out stupa, says Priyank

BENGALURU, DHNS: Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge on Sunday lashed out at attempts to "dig history," stating that "digging any Masjid may give a temple but digging that temple gives a stupa.

"If you try to dig history, you will get caught. If you dig any Masjid, you may get a temple. Digging a temple gives a Stupa. I don't know what you get if a stupa is dug. My limit is 3,000-3,500 years of history."

Priyank was speaking during the release of journalist Naveen Soorinje's latest work, 'Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in the history of the coast.'

Praising Tipu Sultan as a freedom fighter, the minister contrasted Tipu's efforts with the RSS, adding that the RSS didn't even raise a "small voice" against the British.

He referred to Tipu's four Anglo Mysore wars (1767-69, 1780-84, 1790-92 and 1799) and appreciated the 18th century king's anti-colonial credentials. "Tipu Sultan was the father of horticulture. There are documents about it. Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan built Bengaluru's Lalbagh. The MP of that region is anti-Tipu. Will you then burn Lalbagh?" Priyank said in a veiled dig at Bangalore South MP Tejasvi Surya.

Recollecting an instance when he visited England, Priyank noted that a British history scholar had told him: "There are many Indian freedom fighters in the history books of India. However, there are very few Indian freedom fighters in British history books - Tipu Sultan is one."

Charge sheet filed in banker's murder; 'possessive' husband main accused

MANJUNATH SHETTAR
BENGALURU, DHNS

Bhuvaneshwari (R) S Balamurugan

Police have filed a charge sheet in the December murder of a 39-year-old banker, naming her "extremely possessive" estranged husband as the prime accused.

Described as a chilling and premeditated crime driven by suspicion and obsession, the 495-page charge sheet was filed by Magadi Road police before the 24th ACMM court last week.

The document names seven accused and lists 68 witnesses, including onlookers. It includes forensic evidence, CCTV footage, witness statements, and other material gathered during the investigation.

Selva Balamurugan, 40, a tech professional who had quit his job at a multinational company in Whitefield, allegedly shot his estranged wife, Bhuvaneshwari (39), with a country-made pistol in Rajajinagar on December 23. He later surrendered at the Magadi Road police station.

According to the charge sheet, Balamurugan went to great lengths to carry out the murder. Bhuvaneshwari had been living separately with their two children following marital disagreements and was working as an assistant manager at a nationalised bank.

Investigators said Balamurugan was consumed by suspicions about his wife's fidelity, despite finding no evidence of any extramarital relationship. Police said this suspicion became the sole motive for the crime.

"Balamurugan meticulously planned the murder, even scouting the jurisdictional police station beforehand as he intended to surrender immediately after the killing. Months before the incident, he travelled to Bihar with co-accused Abhimanyu Singh, a native of Varanasi, to procure a country-made pistol from a gunrunner. He relied on Singh to navigate language barriers and local contacts. He also carried a knife as a backup in case the firearm failed and had initially planned to hire a hitman," a police officer involved in the investigation said.

Police registered a suo motu case after Balamurugan surrendered and confessed to the crime. He has been booked under sections 103(1), 61, and 190 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), along with Section 27 of the Arms Act, for using an illegal firearm.

The charge sheet states that Balamurugan initially attempted to hire a contract killer. He contacted Moulesh Kumar alias Mouli, a habitual offender from his hometown of Salem, who in turn roped in his associate Periyaswamy Mani alias Manikant for the job. However, the plan fell through after Kumar demanded more money.

Police have named Abhimanyu Singh as accused No 2, while Kumar and Mani are listed as accused no 3 and 4. All three are currently in judicial custody.

Three other accused — Rahul, Hari, and Surya — are absconding. Police believe they assisted in procuring the country-made pistol.

According to investigators, all the accused played roles in facilitating the crime and helping the prime accused evade detection.

Efforts are underway to trace the absconding accused. A supplementary charge sheet will be filed after pending forensic reports are received, police said.

Bypolls: Rs 1.35 crore worth cash, liquor seized

BENGALURU, DHNS: Election authorities have seized Rs 1.35 crore worth of cash, liquor and other materials from the bypoll-bound Bagalkot and Davanagere South constituencies until Sunday.

According to a press release by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka, the State Surveillance Teams and police have booked 53 First Information Reports regarding the seizure of cash, liquor and others. The Excise Department has booked 22 heinous cases, 16 cases for breach of licence conditions.

As on Sunday (3.24 pm), 26 plaints had been registered on cVIGIL. Of this, 19 were found to be correct and disposed. In the National Grievance Redressal System Portal, a total of 62 plaints were registered. In this, 59 were disposed, while inquiry into three new complaints were under progress.

Smartphone in hand, Netflix on TV: Bengaluru prison inmates have it all

DGP suspends 3 staff, orders inquiry into how phones were smuggled into jail

BENGALURU, DHNS

Three officials of the central prison here were suspended after viral videos showed inmates illegally using mobile phones and watching TV inside their cells.

In one of the videos, the inmates claimed Director General of Police (Prisons) Alok Kumar himself facilitated the phone use. Internal inquiries by senior prison officials revealed that this was a "ploy" to defame the top official.

Kumar has suspended jail warders Niranjan Kamath, Hanumantappa Hadpad and Shivanand Karlabatti, while disciplinary action has been initiated against one jailer who was on supervisory duty, sources told *DH*.

Sources said the videos were shot as part of a conspiracy to "defame" DGP Kumar, as he had tightened rules inside the state's largest prison.

Although the videos are believed to have been shot on the intervening night of March 27 and 28, they surfaced on Saturday after a news portal released them.

"See here, friends, this guy is using a mobile phone. See here, they are watching a Netflix movie on TV," one of the inmates is heard saying in the video, while another laughs.

In another video, the same inmate, whose face was seen, was heard saying, "Tomorrow is (IPL) match; Ee sala cup namde. We were given these phones by Alok Kumar. If you pay money here, you will get anything."

After the videos surfaced, prison officials questioned 3 inmates - Darshan, Abhi and Zypsin Daniel - who reportedly revealed their motive was to defame DGP Kumar.

Darshan and Abhi, who are jailed in a murder case in Hennur, were behind the conspiracy, while Daniel's voice was heard in the video.

Prison authowrities have moved the inmates in question to separate cells.

They also searched barrack number 9 and found mobile phones hidden in toilet chamber pipes, wrapped in used milk packets. Officials also found an active Airtel signal in parts of the prison premises and directed the telecom provider to take necessary steps.

An inquiry is underway to identify the source of the smartphones and how they were smuggled into the prison. A separate case has also been opened at Parappana Agrahara station.

An inmate is seen using a mobile phone while a TV is switched on behind him. VIDEO GRAB

Two injured as car, lorry collide, burst into flames

BENGALURU, DHNS: A horrific collision between a car and a container lorry on the national highway near Halasahalli Gate in Hoskote engulfed both vehicles in flames in the early hours of Sunday, police said.

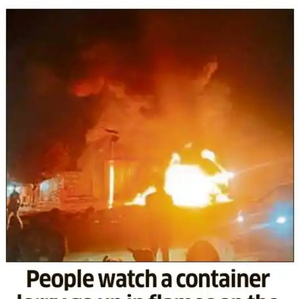
While two occupants of the car escaped with minor injuries, the driver of the container lorry reportedly fled the scene immediately after the crash.

The accident occurred around 2.10 am when the lorry was reportedly attempting a U-turn. A Swift Dzire, travelling at high speed toward Kolar, rammed into the lorry's diesel tank. The impact triggered an immediate fire that spread across both vehicles.

The car's occupants, identified as Manjunath and Gopi, were rescued from the mangled, burning wreck by locals and fire personnel. Both sustained injuries and are currently undergoing treatment at a local hospital in Hoskote, according to police.

"The lorry was loaded with soaps, detergents and diapers, much of which was gutted in the fire. We have registered a case and are investigating the driver's negligence in making an unauthorised U-turn," a Hoskote traffic police officer said. Firefighters battled the blaze for over an hour. Preliminary assessments indicate that both vehicles suffered at least 50% damage.

Hoskote traffic police cleared the wreckage from the highway to ensure smooth traffic flow and are scouring CCTV footage from nearby toll plazas to trace the absconding driver.



People watch a container lorry go up in flames on the NH near Halasahalli Gate early Sunday.

2 dead after wrong-side car driver rams into scooter

BENGALURU, DHNS

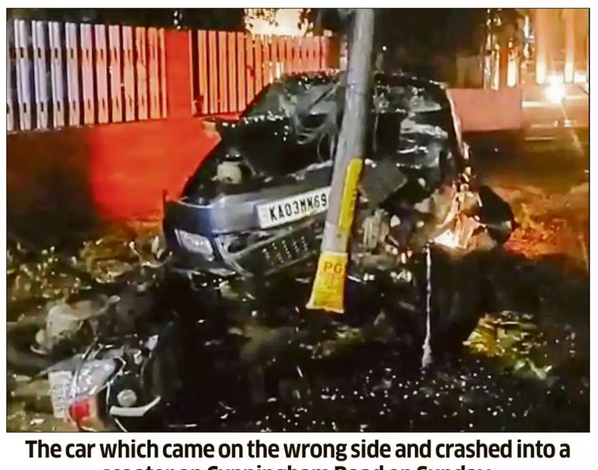
A 42-year-old man and his teenage relative were killed after a car driver, allegedly driving on the wrong side, struck their scooter in a head-on collision in central Bengaluru's Cunningham Road in the early hours of Sunday, police said.

Zubair Ahmed, 42, and Munir Ahmed, 16, were heading home to Fraser Town from KR Market when the accident occurred near the Karnataka State Board of Waqf office around 3 am.

According to the High Grounds traffic police, the victims were travelling on their Suzuki Access from the Chandrika Hotel side.

Just then, a Volkswagen car raced up in the opposite direction, bursting into the one-way street.

The car driver — 26-year-old Ayyappa — allegedly entered the one-way illegally and was speeding.



The car which came on the wrong side and crashed into a scooter on Cunningham Road on Sunday.

The car collided head-on with the motorcycle right behind the High Grounds police station, killing both riders on the spot due to the impact.

"The driver was driving in a rash and negligent manner on a one-way road. We have seized the car and taken the driver into custody," a senior police officer stated.

The High Grounds traffic police have registered a case under section 106 (causing death by negligence) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and relevant sections of the Motor Vehicles Act for one-way violations.

4,900 vacancies filled in police dept: CM

MYSURU, DHNS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Sunday that the state government has filled 4,911 vacant posts in the police department till now and will make recruitment to remaining 8,000 vacancies.

The chief minister was speaking during the passing out parade of 327 police sub-inspectors (civil), who completed their 14-month training at Karnataka Police Academy in Mysuru. Siddaramaiah told the police personnel that the government was with them.

The chief minister promised to extend all the necessary support to the police department.

He said that the police represented the government and called upon them on to serve courageously with discipline, honesty and integrity.

He urged them to practice people-friendly policing, serve the innocent with compassion and humanity, and be strict towards wrong-doers.

Siddaramaiah asked police to strive to free Karnataka free from drug menace.

Menace of drugs

"I know the respective jurisdictional sub-inspectors have information about the location where the drugs are produced and to whom the contraband will be distributed. So, the police have to eliminate the menace from society to avoid its implications on youth and students. At a time when there are new forms of cyber crime, the police should take all advanced measures to prevent them," the chief minister said.

Overlooked Parkinson's variant harms Indian patients more: Nimhans study

AMULLYA SHIVASHANKAR
BENGALURU, DHNS

Patients with Parkinson's disease in India could soon benefit from treatments that directly target the underlying cause of the condition, new research from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (Nimhans) suggests.

The study, published in the international journal 'Cells' and led by Dr Indrani Datta of Nimhans, shows that the LRRK2 I1371V variant, found mainly in Indian and East Asian patients, causes more damage to brain cells than G2019S, the most studied Parkinson's mutation globally.

This misclassification meant that despite clinicians observing severe motor symptoms, earlier disease onset, cognitive impairment, and poor response to standard therapies in patients carrying I1371V, the scientific community lacked cellular and molecular evidence to fully assess its impact.

Parkinson's disease, a progressive disorder marked by the loss of dopamine-producing brain cells, mainly affects older adults.

Explaining the findings, Dr Indrani told *DH* that the LRRK2 I1371V mutation is not only disease-causing but, in several ways, causes more damage to brain cells than G2019S.

"The G2019S genetic mutation is prevalent among Caucasian and Ashkenazi Jewish populations, but is found in less than 0.1% of Indian patients or even East Asian patients," said Dr Indrani.

Based on one study, the I1371V mutation found in Indians had been wrongly classified as non-pathogenic.

The team tested two LRRK2-targeting drugs on cells with the I1371V mutation. One, MLi-2, blocks the protein's activity, while the other, GW5074, acts more broadly through multiple pathways.

GW5074 significantly outperformed MLi-2 in reversing membrane damage, restoring cholesterol levels, rebuilding cell surface architecture, and recovering dopamine transporter function.

This finding suggests that the I1371V mutation's damage is driven mainly by a different part of the LRRK2 protein, its GTPase domain, rather than the kinase domain targeted by most existing drugs.

In simple terms, the drug that works for one variant of Parkinson's may not work for another, Dr Indrani explained.

GTPases (guanosine triphosphatases) are enzymes that act as molecular switches in cells, while kinases facilitate the transfer of phosphate groups, playing a key role in cell signalling and regulation.

"Classifying I1371V as non-pathogenic based on a single study conducted in the wrong cell type had real consequences for how doctors and researchers understood the disease in patients who carry it," she said.

East Corpn seizes 51 properties over tax dues

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Bengaluru East City Corporation has initiated proceedings to take possession of 51 properties in Mahadevapura and KR Puram zones over long-pending tax dues.

The move comes as the financial year draws to a close.

Corporation Commissioner DS Ramesh said the move followed due process under the Greater Bengaluru Governance Act, 2025, and the Property Tax Assessment, Collection and Management Rules, 2024.

"Show-cause and demand notices were issued well in advance, accompanied by multiple reminders, including mobile alerts, urging defaulters to clear their dues," he said.

While some property owners settled outstanding amounts during earlier auction proceedings, 51 properties — 28 in Mahadevapura and 23 in KR Puram — continue to default. "These properties neither cleared their dues nor attracted successful bids during the auction. As a result, the corporation will proceed to take them into possession," Ramesh said.

Window of relief

However, authorities have offered a final window of relief.

Property owners have been given a month to clear pending taxes. If there is no response, officials said the properties would be valued at the prevailing guideline rate, with outstanding dues deducted and the remaining amount deposited into the owners' bank accounts.

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Commercial cylinder supply to state hiked by 68%: Min

4,200 cylinders per day to edu institutions, hospitals, hostels

BENGALURU, DHNS

Food and Civil Supplies Minister K H Muniyappa said on Sunday that the Union government had increased the supply of commercial cylinders to Karnataka by 68% (29,463 cylinders).

Addressing a press conference, the minister noted that 4,200 cylinders would be provided every day on first priority to educational institutions, hospitals, hostels and so on, followed by 1,200 cylinders (second priority) to government departments, PSUs, airports, railway and bus stations and so on.

As many as 17,500 cylinders will be given on third priority to hotels, dhabas, restaurants, industries and so on, while agriculture and related fields, fisheries, sericulture and so on will be provided 6,000 cylinders (fourth priority).

As many as 563 cylinders will be provided on other priority basis. Overall, 29,463 cylinders are expected to be provided each day.

"Since the union government has provided more cylinders, there are expectations that the LPG supply situation in the state may substantially improve in the coming days."

'LPG distribution at govt-fixed rate'

"There have been complaints that some private gas distributors are selling LPG cylinders at rates higher than those notified by the government. A stern notification has been issued to all distributors to strictly distribute cylinders at the rates fixed by the government," Muniyappa said.

He noted that strict action as per the law would be initiated against those selling cylinders for greater costs for domestic use, commercial use and Auto LPG. "District-level overseeing committees headed by DCs have been formed, and supervision is being conducted on the provision and distribution of LPG, rate fixation, misuse and so on. Raids and checks have been taken to prevent black marketing."

The food minister also clarified that there was no shortage of auto LPG. There are 72 Auto LPG Dispensing Stations (ALDS) in the state.

Of this, 31 are there in Bengaluru itself. In all the stations in Karnataka, especially those in Bengaluru, LPG is available through public sector oil marketing companies such as IOCL, BPCL and HPCL, the minister said. These organisations are selling auto LPG at a cost of Rs 77.74, he added.

PNG users cooking on LPG stoves paying for 25%...

PNG, From Page 1

Ray said: "Any consumer who switches to a PNG stove will recover the cost in reduced bills within the next few months."

Apart from wastage of precious energy, the unburnt gas is adding to the climate crisis.

PNG is based on methane and 1 kg of wasted PNG is as deadly as 80 kg of CO2 in terms of its power to trap heat and contribute to global warming.

A cursory look on the Internet suggests that CSIR-IIP study is well known among the leaders in the sector.

Flyers issued

The institute itself has issued flyers advertising the benefit of PNG stoves and describing the retrofitting as a safety hazard.

In fact, the institute has transferred the technology to 42 domestic stove and burner manufacturing companies.

Chiradeep Datta, Chief Operating Officer of Think Gas, a private company that is one of the major suppliers of PNG in Karnataka, said the company informs its consumers to install a PNG-compliant stove as per the standards issued by the government.

"However, there is no mandate to stop conversion/retrofitment of LPG stoves to PNG. Further, due to the current LPG crisis, the focus of the government is to bring as many consumers as possible into the PNG fold. The city gas distributor entities are working round the clock to achieve this objective," he said.

Ray said the gazette notification issued in August 2023 can be used to end the problem of retrofitting.

He said there was a possibility that distributor companies were not interested in enforcing it.

An advisor to the PNGRB agreed that the matter needs to be addressed immediately.

"We need to stop the wastage of PNG, whose value cannot be overstated. The distributor companies have to understand that they have a big role to play in this matter," he said.

Rapid expansion

The PNG distribution has witnessed rapid expansion, with household connections increasing significantly to over 1.59 crore, up from 25 lakh in 2014. Karnataka is estimated to have crossed 5.5 lakh connections in March.

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SALVAGE ACT

Workers sift through ginger harvest following sudden rainfall in Shivamogga on Sunday. PTI PHOTO

Fear of ground ops loom...

Iran, From Page 1

In Tehran, two blasts shook the city early Sunday, although it was not clear what was targeted.

Iranian forces said they had fired a volley of missiles and drones at plants belonging to two of the world's largest aluminium producers in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, targeting what they described as industries linked to the US military.

In Israel, thick black smoke could be seen rising from an industrial complex in the Negev desert in images released by the Israel Fire and Rescue Authority. The military said the impact may have been caused by missile shrapnel, shortly after it detected a new barrage fired from Iran.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel will widen its invasion of Lebanon. Netanyahu said Israel would expand what he called the "existing security strip" in southern Lebanon as Israeli forces target the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group.

Chit fund bizman slits throats of mother, sister & nephew, tries to kill self

Two dead, two in coma in suspected murder-suicide pact over debt distress

BENGALURU, DHNS

In a suspected murder-suicide pact driven by debt distress, a chit fund businessman allegedly slit the throat of his mother, sister and nephew before attempting to take his own life in a similar manner.

The incident was reported from Mellenahalli in Bidaraguppe gram panchayat limits of Anekal taluk on Bengaluru's southern outskirts around 10 pm on Saturday.

Mohan Gowda (27) allegedly slit the throats of his mother Asha (55), sister Varshita (34) and her 11-year-old son Mayank Gowda before turning the knife on himself, police sources said.

Mohan reportedly recorded a video and sent it to his relatives, stating that financial debt had pushed him to do it. This prompted a response from the relatives, who broke open the door, and took them to the hospital and informed the police. While Asha and Varshita died on the spot due to severe injuries, Mohan and Mayank were still alive despite heavy blood losses. They were rushed to a private hospital and are said to have gone into a coma.

Preliminary investigation suggests the family had incurred debts running into crores of rupees. It is suspected that mounting pressure from creditors led to the incident. Sources said that Gowda was involved in a chit fund business and dealt in amounts between Rs 5 lakh and Rs one crore. Due to his extravagant lifestyle, debts mounted and unable to repay them, he took the extreme step, police sources said.

Bengaluru Rural Superintendent of Police Chandrakant M V visited the spot and inspected the scene. A case has been registered at Attibele police station, and further investigation is underway.

Living with 'foxy' neighbours...

Living with fox, From Page 1

The Ranebennur Blackbuck Sanctuary, known for its vast grasslands, attracts hundreds of migratory bird species.

Chandru has also set up a small bird hide on his private land—a makeshift shed covered with green sheets — where wildlife photographers and birdwatchers can observe the birds. He has recorded over 250 bird species.

Haveri Deputy Conservator of Forests Akshay Prakashkar, who recently visited the site, said the department will intensify monitoring of the area to ensure the safety of the fox and jackal families.

Hyena pups

In the first week of January, a female hyena littered three pups in a field belonging to Mahantesh Ambigar in Gadag district.

Though initially frightened, the farmer allowed the hyena to rear her cubs after being assured by the forest department and researcher Manjunath S Nayak.

"Lesser-known species often make their dens near human habitations. The department cannot notify or take over such lands. Instead, the department should encourage farmers not to disturb the animals by paying compensation," said Manjunath.

Four children of a family drown in farm pond in Yadgir

YADGIR, DHNS: Four kids of a family, aged between 6 and 11 years, drowned in a farm pond while swimming at Naganur village near Kembhavi of Yadgir district on Sunday.

According to the police, the incident occurred when the kids had gone to the pond for a swim as it was a school holiday.

Kiran, Sharat (both 6 years old), Hanumesh (7) and Basamma (11) drowned in the pond soon after they entered the waterbody for a swim, the police said.

The tragic incident sent shock waves among the villagers. Parents were inconsolable on seeing the bodies of their children.

Assistant commissioner Sridhar Goturu, deputy superintendent of police Javed Inamdar and block education officer Yellappa Kadlur visited the village and consoled the bereaved parents. The Kembhavi police have registered a case.

This is the second such incident in the district within a span of five months. Three boys had met a watery grave at a farm pond in the neighbouring Khanapur village a few months back

5 arrested for attempting to attack police personnel

UDUPI, DHNS: The police have arrested five persons in connection with two separate incidents of attempting to attack police personnel and engaging in an alleged cricket betting racket in Karkala and Shirva.

According to police, the first incident occurred near a two-wheeler showroom at Hanchikatte of Karkala taluk. Police Sub-Inspector Prasanna M S and his team from Karkala Rural Police Station flagged a car indicating the driver to stop the vehicle.

However, the occupants of the vehicle allegedly attempted to run over the police with the intention to kill them and obstructed them from discharging their duties. Karkala Town Police have registered a case.

In a related incident, PSI Manjunath Marabada of Shirva Police Station intercepted the same vehicle near Padavu in Shirva village after it was found moving suspiciously from Belman. The driver initially slowed down but allegedly pushed the officer and attempted to flee. The vehicle was later stopped in Shirva town by police personnel.

During investigation, the accused were found to be involved in an organised cricket betting racket.

Police said the group lured people into investing money in betting, cheated them, and engaged in illegal gambling activities.

A case was registered at Shirva Police Station under relevant sections of the BNS and the Karnataka Police Act.

Man abducted, assaulted over mistaken identity

BENGALURU, DHNS: Police in southwestern Bengaluru have launched an investigation after unidentified men allegedly abducted a man and assaulted him in what they described as a case of mistaken identity.

The incident occurred on March 24 near Nagarahole Circle in Byadarahalli and came to light on Saturday after a video went viral on social media, invoking public outcry. According to police, armed suspects arrived on an auto-rickshaw looking for a man named Nataraj alias Nata. They mistook Sharath Krishne Gowda, who was drinking tea with his friends, for Nata.

One of the suspects asked him if he was Nata. Despite Gowda's refusal, the men claimed he was Nata, assaulted him, forced him into their auto and drove off.

After going some distance, the gang allegedly used Gowda's phone, called his sister and abused her. But they realised they had picked up the wrong man after checking Gowda's phone. Realising the mistaken identity, they released him midway and threatened him against approaching the police. However, a traumatised Gowda reached the Byadarahalli police station and lodged an FIR. An investigation is underway to trace the suspects.

Airlines to offer at least 60% free seating from April 20: DGCA

NEW DELHI, PTI

Airlines will start offering at least 60% of seats in a flight without levying any additional charge from April 20, as well as maintain a transparent seat allocation policy, according to aviation watchdog DGCA.

On March 18, the civil aviation ministry announced that directions have been issued to the DGCA to direct airlines to allocate a minimum of 60% of seats for selection on any flight free of charge to ensure fair access for passengers. In this regard, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) issued the amended Air Transport Circular dated March 20.

A DGCA official said the circular would come into effect from April 20.

The regulator has said that airlines should ensure at least "60% of the seats in any flight shall be offered free of charge".

"Airlines should maintain transparent seat allocation policies and clearly communicate the availability of free seats and applicable conditions on their booking interfaces," as per a revised circular dated March 20. Also, the regulator has said that passengers travelling on the same PNR (Passenger Name Record) should, as far as practicable, be allotted seats in close proximity to one another, ordinarily meaning adjacent seats in the same row.

An official said airlines are preparing to implement the new directive.

At present, 20% of the seats can be booked free of charge, while the rest are paid. Generally, airlines charge Rs 200 to Rs 2,100 for choosing seats, depending on various factors, including front rows and extra leg room, a travel industry executive had said.

Among other aspects, the circular has mentioned that all relevant charges for optional services relating to sports equipment or musical instruments, including any liability conditions in case of damage, should be displayed in a transparent and unambiguous manner on airline websites and booking platforms.

DGCA has said the circular will take effect 30 days from its issuance date. The move also comes against the backdrop of rising concerns that airlines are levying high charges for various services, including seat selection.

DH Classifieds

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4	MS Scrap	150	110	260
5	MS Headrest Pipes	-	80	80
6	MS Steel & Wood (Metal Box)	-	18	18
7	MS Rail with Plastic wheels	7	-	7
8	Empty Metal Barrels	140	-	140
9	Plastic & PVC (High Grade)	85	15	100
10	Plastics Painted & Nylon parts (Low Grade)	51	-	51
11	Wood scrap	70	30	100
12	PU Foam	20	-	20
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I, VENKATARAVANA SETTY, Residing at #40, 1st main, Subbanna Garden, Vijayanagar, Bengaluru-40 have changed my name as N. VENKATARAMANA SETTY, vide affidavit dated 27/03/2026 before Notary H.S. Sakalesh Aradhya, Bengaluru

I SHEELA K W/O Pradeep Kumar G R/o Kariyappa Layout 4th Cross Channamumbapura Abbalagere Shimoga Karnataka 577225 have changed my name Sheela K to Sheela Pradeep Kumar.

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◆ WEATHER ◆

Overview : Rainfall occurred at many places over Coastal, a few places over South Interior and at one or two places over North Interior Karnataka.
Forecast March 30: Partly cloudy sky. Light rain/ thundershowers likely in some areas towards evening/night.

INTERIOR NORTH

Stations	Max	Min	Rain
Belagavi	35.0	18.6	0.0
Bidar	37.0	20.6	0.0
Vijayapura	36.6	18.5	0.0
Dharwad	34.8	19.6	30.0
Haveri	34.4	18.4	0.0
Kalaburagi	38.4	24.0	0.0
Raichur	38.0	24.0	0.0
COASTAL			
Honnavar	34.1	20.9	57.0
Karwar	35.8	25.6	0.0
Shirali	NA	NA	NA
Mangaluru	33.8	22.4	31.2

INTERIOR SOUTH

Stations	Max	Min	Rain
Agumbe	32.4	19.9	2.5
Bengaluru	34.6	21.3	1.8
Ballari	NA	NA	NA
Chamarajanagar	--	--	--
Chikkamagaluru	--	--	--
Chitradurga	35.3	22.0	0.0
Davangere	37.0	17.0	5.0
Hassan	33.7	14.6	0.0
Mysuru	34.6	19.0	17.0
Madikeri	--	--	--
Kolar	35.2	20.2	0.0

OTHER STATIONS

New Delhi	33.0	21.0	NIL
Kolkata	34.0	26.0	NIL
Mumbai	31.0	26.0	NA
Chennai	33.0	26.0	NA
Pune	35.0	22.0	NA
Hyderabad	35.0	24.0	NA
Th'puram	31.0	26.0	NIL

PM seen as pliant pushover by US: Congress

NEW DELHI, DHNS: Congress on Sunday claimed Prime Minister Narendra Modi is being "only seen as a pliant pushover" by the United States, with Pakistan becoming a 'dalaal (broker)" signalling a "colossal failure" of his foreign policy and narrative management after the military success in Operation Sindoor.

It said the "unravelling" of Modi's heavily "personality-driven foreign policy" has exposed "the self-styled Vishwaguru as a Vishwaphoney".

General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said Modi has tried to "appease" the US in various ways, and even his "betrayal" of farmers via the trade deal that gave the US unprecedented access to Indian agriculture markets has not been able to help him gain any diplomatic leverage with the US.

"He's only seen as a pliant pushover," he posted on X, as the party attacked the government defended Pakistan's mediation role in West Asia, saying there is nothing new in Pakistan's mediation efforts in the matter, as that country has been "used" by the US since 1981.

Ramesh said Pakistan is a country where democracy is a farce to be reckoned with, whose economy is a basket case, dependent on a lifeline extended by the IMF and a few other donors like China and Saudi Arabia.

Naxalite carrying Rs 5L bounty gunned down in Ch'garh

SUKMA, PTI: A Naxalite carrying a bounty of Rs 5 lakh was killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Sunday, two days before the March 31 deadline set by the Centre to eliminate Left Wing Extremism from the country, police said.

The gunfight occurred on a forested hill under the Polampalli police station area, where a team of the District Reserve Guard (DRG), a unit of the state police, was out on an anti-Naxal operation based on inputs about the presence of Maoists in the area, Sukma superintendent of police said.

Once the exchange of fire stopped, the body of a Naxalite, along with a weapon, was recovered from the spot, he said.

The deceased cadre, Muchaki Kailash, was the section commander of platoon no. 31 of Maoists and carried a bounty of Rs 5 lakh, the official said.

He said Kailash was involved in incidents of civilian killing, planting IEDs and attacks on police.

Global turbulence tests India, unity key: PM amid West Asia crisis

Warns against 'self-serving politics', stresses resilience

Narendra Modi

NEW DELHI, DHNS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called upon people to stand united in the face of challenges due to global turbulence triggered by a "fierce war" being waged in West Asia. He also urged that no politics should be played over an issue that concerns millions of citizens.

"There is no place for self-serving politics in this. Those spreading rumours are causing great harm to the country, and I appeal to everyone to stay alert and not be misled by misinformation," Modi said in his monthly radio broadcast *Mann ki Baat* aired Sunday morning.

The Prime Minister also expressed gratitude to the Gulf nations for extending assistance to over one crore Indians living and working in the region.

Reflecting upon the challenges that emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic a few years back, Modi said that after emerging from the crisis, the world had hoped to make a new start towards progress.

"The region where the war is underway is a major hub of our energy needs, due to which a petrol and diesel crisis is developing worldwide. India is facing these challenges resolutely because of its global relations, assistance from different countries and the capabilities it has built over the past decade," the PM said.

Modi said the current situation is challenging, but with the support from various countries, and "the strengths the country has built over the past decade have enabled India to bravely confront these circumstances."

In Palakkad, the prime minister said the central government is working to limit the impact of the West Asia war on India, while accusing the Congress of making "dangerous" remarks that could put Indians living in the Gulf at risk for political gain".

Speaking at a massive NDA election rally in Kerala's Palakkad district, the prime minister said that many people from Kerala are working in conflict-hit regions and stressed that their safety remains a top priority.

"At this time, everyone's attention is on the war going on in West Asia. Our government is continuously working to ensure that its impact on India is minimal," he said, in an apparent reference to the safety of Indians living in the Gulf and India's dependence on crude oil and gas from conflict-affected regions.

He said Indian embassies are working round the clock to support citizens abroad.

(With PTI inputs)

2 more Indian LPG vessels cross strait

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

People gather outside a closed gas agency in Prayagraj. PTI

Two more Indian-flagged LPG tankers—BW TYR and BW ELM — have safely navigated through the war-hit Strait of Hormuz and are expected to reach Indian shores in the next couple of days.

Two LPG carriers have a combined LPG cargo of about 94,000 tonnes, roughly a day's supply of the country's cooking gas.

BW TYR is proceeding towards Mumbai with an expected arrival on March 31, and BW ELM is en route to New Mangalore with an estimated arrival date of April 1, an official in the Ministry of Shipping said here on Sunday.

Earlier, four Indian-flagged LPG tankers had safely sailed through the strait.

For a country that relies on imports from Gulf nations to meet as much as 60% of its cooking gas needs, the arrivals will help ease the worst LPG shortage it is battling in decades. India consumed 33.15 million tonnes of LPG last year, with imports accounting for about 60% of demand. As much as 90% of those imports came from West Asia.

With the Strait all but shut, the government is sourcing LPG from alternative sources like the US and Argentina.

"A total of 18 Indian-flagged vessels with 485 Indian seafarers remain in the western Persian Gulf region," the statement said.

The DG Shipping control room is operating round-the-clock and has handled 4,523 calls and 8,985 emails since activation, including 92 calls and 120 emails in the past 24 hours, the statement said, adding that safe repatriation of more than 942 Indian seafarers so far, including four in the last day, has been facilitated, a statement from the government said.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said that it has stepped up measures to secure fuel and gas supplies, while urging citizens to avoid panic buying as sporadic rushes were reported at fuel stations.

Setback to BJP as FCRA bill stirs backlash in Kerala

Churches in the state uneasy over foreign fund law

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

OUTREACH JOLT

- Churches fear provisions in amendment bill target Christian-run NGOs
- Bill allows seizure of NGO properties if licences lapse or are cancelled
- Congress accuses BJP of double standards in church outreach
- BJP already facing setbacks after attacks on nuns and priests

Resentment among Christian churches in Kerala over the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha recently, has come out in the open. The churches fear the move targets Christian community-run organisations that receive foreign contributions.

The issue is likely to pose a setback for the BJP in poll-bound Kerala, which has a Christian population of 18%.

Provisions allowing the seizure of NGO properties in cases of suspension, cancellation or non-renewal of licences — and treating licences as deemed cancelled if renewal applications are rejected — are seen by the churches as attempts to tighten the Centre's grip over NGOs.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the Kerala Catholic Bishops Council have expressed concerns over the bill.

Thomas Tharayil of the Changanasserry Archdiocese of the Syro-Malabar Church said foreign funds were used only for purposes such as educating children and running hospitals. He added that the Centre's fresh moves were portraying charitable activities funded by foreign donations in a negative light.

Catholic Congress global director Fr Philip Kaviyil told *DH* that many such measures by the Centre were creating the impression that a community was being targeted.

AICC general secretary KC Venugopal said that BJP leaders who visited churches with cakes during Christmas are now trying to target them by introducing fresh provisions in the FCRA laws.

The BJP has already suffered setbacks in its Christian outreach efforts in Kerala following back-to-back incidents of attacks on nuns and priests at several places.

Letter to Modi

Kerala Opposition leader VD Satheesan wrote to Modi, urging him to reconsider the proposed amendments. He said there was concern that they could disproportionately affect the functioning of minority institutions.

Bill proposes govt takeover of foreign-funded places of worship

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

BIG CHANGES

- Govt to create a powerful body to take control of foreign funds and NGO assets
- Assets of NGOs losing FCRA licence can be provisionally and permanently vested with the authority
- Clear deadlines for utilisation of foreign funds and tighter regulation during suspension or expiry
- FCRA registration lapses if not renewed on time or if renewal is denied
- Penalty reduced to 1 year, but stricter monitoring and prior government approval needed for probes

A Bill seeking to amend the law on foreign funds proposes to take over places of worship built or renovated using donations from abroad if it loses the licence for collecting such money.

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, tabled in Parliament last week, however, does not allow changing the "religious character" of such places while entrusting their management to a person whose terms and conditions would be determined later.

It proposes to take over any asset created using foreign funds if an entity allowed to collect such donations has its licence cancelled, ceased or suspended. Such assets would then be vested in a "designated authority" permanently if the entities fail to renew their licence within a specified time.

The Bill also proposes that such assets could be transferred to "any ministry, department, authority, or agency" of the Union or state governments or any local authority and then sold, but no functionary of the entity facing action could buy them.

The introduction of the Bill in the Lok Sabha on March 25 attracted objections from the Opposition, who called it "dangerous", even as Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai defended it.

The Bill attracted the ire of parties like the Congress and the Trinamool Congress, as well as organisations like the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), which said it threatened the operational survival of minorities and civil-society organisations dependent on foreign funds.

Congress leader and ex-IAS officer Kannan Gopinathan found fault with the repeated use of the "public interest" and "if satisfied" clauses in Section 16 of the Bill without any definition, saying it granted the government "near-unfettered discretion" to take over assets.

"This effectively gives the State operational control of NGOs under the guise of asset supervision without requiring proof of wrongdoing," he said.

He also claimed that the vesting of assets wholly in the "designated authority" created a "powerful incentive" for the State to pursue technical or minor violations to capture high-value infrastructure that might have been primarily funded domestically.

55-year-old dies waiting in LPG line for 4 hrs in Maharashtra

MUMBAI, DHNS: A 55-year-old former sarpanch died while waiting in a queue for LPG cylinders in sweltering heat on Saturday afternoon in the Akola district in Maharashtra.

The deceased, identified as Shankarrao Sirsat (55), hailed from Anvi Mirzapur village, 20 km from Akola town.

According to reports, Sirsat stood in line at 9 am on Saturday at an LPG gas agency to book a refill for his widowed daughter-in-law. However, he collapsed in the afternoon.

It may be mentioned that Akola is facing sweltering heat with temperatures hovering over 40 degrees Celsius around noon.

Opposition parties slammed the Centre and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the "wrong policies."

VBA founder-president Prakash Ambedkar described Sirsat's death as the first victim of the gas cylinder shortage.

"Sirsat, who had been standing in line since around nine in the morning to get an LPG cylinder, felt dizzy around 1.30 pm and collapsed and died. There had been prior warnings that a gas cylinder shortage was going to happen. Yet, the government did not make proper arrangements," said Ambedkar.

"Due to the wrong policies of the governments, ordinary citizens are losing their lives," he added.

Nitish likely to quit as MLC today, to continue as chief minister

ABHAY KUMAR
PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who was elected as a Rajya Sabha member on March 16, is likely to quit as a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) on Monday, ruling party sources told *DH* here on Sunday.

"On Monday, Nitish may quit as MLC, as the rule says that one has to resign from the State legislature within 14 days of being elected as a member of the Parliament. Nitish ji was elected as Rajya Sabha member on March 16," said Nitish's aide, preferring anonymity, as the decision has not been formally announced.

Nitish Kumar

Speculation is also rife that Nitish may not resign as Bihar CM immediately after quitting as MLC. "The law is very clear that anyone can remain a CM for the next six months before becoming a member of either of the two Houses," clarified one of Nitish's ministers, Shravan Kumar, adding that it's up to Nitish to take a call on when to quit as the CM.

Nitish, who completed his Samriddhi Yatra on Thursday, never uttered a word on how long he will continue as Bihar CM or when he will take oath as Rajya Sabha member.

However, ruling party sources hinted that Nitish may take the oath as a Rajya Sabha member in the second week of April.

'Oath on April 13'

"Most probably, Nitish will take oath as Rajya Sabha member on April 13. Around the same time, he will quit as Bihar CM, and the BJP will have its own CM," said the ruling party source, adding that the new CM "will take oath after the 'Kharmas' (inauspicious period) ends on April 14".

Notably, Nitish, during his Samriddhi Yatra, dropped ample hints that his deputy Samrat Choudhary could be the next Bihar CM. "Now, Samrat will handle everything," Nitish said on multiple occasions during his yatra.

Though the BJP has already clarified that Nitish will have his say on his successor, a section of JD(U) has been demanding that his son Nishant be elevated as Bihar chief minister, and not as Deputy CM.

4 NSCN cadres killed in ambush by rival faction in Manipur

NIGHT ATTACK

- Six NSCN (Eastern Flank faction) cadres allegedly stopped by rival-faction members at Hongbei village around 9 pm on Saturday
- Four of them were shot down, while two managed to flee, say police sources
- Subsequently, mob torches NSCN office in Ukhrul town, alleging group's involvement in ambush

GUWAHATI, DHNS: Four cadres of a faction of the Naga insurgent group NSCN were gunned down allegedly by a rival faction in Manipur's Kamjong district, triggering tension in the neighbouring Ukhrul district.

Six NSCN (Eastern Flank faction) cadres were allegedly stopped by the rival faction members at Hongbei village at around 9 pm on Saturday, and four of them were shot down. Two managed to flee, said police sources.

Hours later, the NSCN issued a statement on Sunday clarifying that no "order" was issued to carry out the attack, while suspecting it to be a fratricidal fight.

This, however, did not diffuse the tension that gripped parts of Ukhrul, dominated by the Tangkhul Naga tribe, on Sunday.

A mob torched an NSCN office in Ukhrul town, alleging the group's involvement in the Saturday-night ambush.

Manipur CM's appeal

Terming the situation in Ukhrul tense, Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Sunday appealed to members of the Tangkhul community to diffuse tensions and help the state maintain the law-and-order situation.

"Violence cannot bring any solution. I appeal to all to shun any form of violence. The government has taken the development seriously, and the law should take its own course," he said in a statement on Sunday evening.

The incident took place amid Kuki-Naga tension in Ukhrul and amid efforts to end the Meitei-Kuki conflict in the state that has been raging since May 2023.

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Yet another tool to intimidate NGOs

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha last week, is aimed at further constraining the functioning of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and extending greater government control over them. It envisages the setting up of a "designated authority" for the management and disposal of foreign funds and assets of NGOs whose registration is cancelled, surrendered or ceased under the law. The government argues that the bill is intended to plug loopholes in the original legislation of 2010, but in reality, it will render NGOs more vulnerable and liable to arbitrary action. The government's hostility to NGOs is no secret, and the amendment will give it another tool to harass them. The government has adopted policies in the past to make the working of NGOs difficult, and even to kill many of them.

One controversial provision is the proposal to grant the government the power to take control of assets created from foreign contributions by NGOs whose licences have been cancelled or suspended. The authority is empowered to manage, use, transfer, or dispose of such assets for 'public purposes'. There is a bar on transfer or disposal of assets created from foreign funds without prior government approval. This affects the operational autonomy of the organisations. The mandate for state governments to seek the Centre's prior approval for initiating any FCRA-related investigation limits the states' powers and is against federal principles.

The government is amending the law to further throttle groups whose causes it does not like

These moves are a continuation of the amendments made to the 2010 Act in 2016, 2018 and 2020, all of which made its provisions increasingly stringent. The powers granted to the 'designated authority' is discretionary, which means there is scope for subjectivity and arbitrariness. The provision for takeover of assets is an extreme provision—it could mean the end of the organisation. In many cases, assets are created with both domestic funds and foreign contributions. Separating them will be difficult. The bill also focuses on compliance. The need for compliance to rules often becomes a need to conform to the government's line. Even rules and provisions which are sound and good could be misinterpreted and misused to target organisations which question the government's policies or work in areas not liked by the government. NGOs that promote human rights and such other citizens' rights have always been at the receiving end. In a little over a decade, the foreign contribution licences of 20,711 organisations have been cancelled, leaving only about 16,000 bodies with an FCRA certification. The FCRA is increasingly seen as a political weapon used by the government. The Opposition has termed the bill "dangerous', and it has given rise to wide criticism from civil society groups.

Third language call marks priority shift

The Karnataka government's decision to alter the assessment pattern for the third language in the SSLC examinations has drawn mixed reactions and invited sharp criticism alongside support. Announced by School Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa, the reform replaces marks with a grading system for the third language, removes it from the aggregate score, and eliminates the pass–fail requirement. While appearing for the examination remains mandatory, a student's overall result will no longer hinge on performance in this subject. According to the government, the new policy addresses a serious concern: the 2024–25 examination saw over 1.4 lakh students fail in Hindi, which is taught in nearly 96% of state syllabus schools. The move aims to mitigate the risk of students losing an academic year due to a single non-core subject. This is expected to reduce anxiety and enable greater focus on core disciplines such as mathematics and science, which are more consequential for higher education.

However, critics question the timing: introducing such a significant change on the eve of the examination betrays students who have spent the year preparing for the paper. Policy shifts of this magnitude are best introduced at the start of an academic year. There are also apprehensions about a possible dilution of academic rigour. If a subject no longer contributes to the final score, it risks being treated as incidental by both students and institutions. They see this not as a genuine educational reform but as a knee-jerk reaction taken under pressure from Kannada activists—a convenient political exit. Supporters, on the other hand, counter that Hindi proficiency is not essential for employment outcomes and that classroom time may be better utilised in building practical life skills. They situate this reform in a broader historical context. Resistance to 'Hindi imposition' has deep roots in the state, from early protests in the 1930s to the 1963 Town Hall resolution in Bengaluru advocating a two-language formula. The student unrest of the late 1960s underscored the depth of this sentiment. Proponents further argue that the three-language formula has been unevenly implemented. While students in the South have had to contend with Hindi, many northern states meet the requirement through the 'Sanskrit loophole', with limited engagement with other Indian languages.

Karnataka's decision to alter exam scheme comes from decades of resistance to 'Hindi hegemony'

While the state defends this as a balance between student welfare and socio-political realities, it follows a pattern of lowering benchmarks—previously seen in the reduction of pass percentages—to artificially improve SSLC results. Such systemic shifts require careful deliberation so that, in the process of reducing the burden on students, the value of the certificate itself is not inadvertently diminished.

OIL CRISIS

Strategic reserves must define India's energy reset

Diversifying import sources without improving home reserves may prove an insufficient strategy

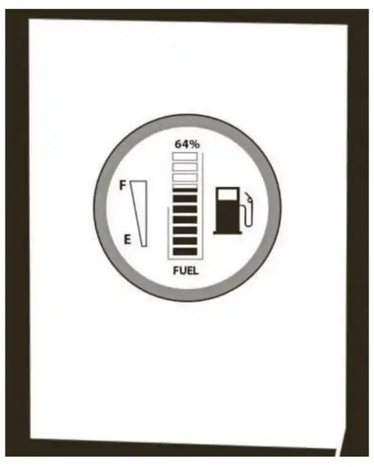
PARSA VENKATESHWAR RAO JR

The Indian government has maintained a reasonably calm approach towards the disruptions in crude oil and natural gas imports caused by the ongoing war between the United States, Israel, and Iran. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statements in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha last week summarised the evolving situation. He noted that the war negatively impacted the global economy and its effects would linger. However, the crisis has highlighted the vulnerabilities in India's oil and natural gas supply lines. As remedial measures, the Prime Minister indicated diversifying oil and natural gas sources from 27 to 41 countries and increasing the production and blending of ethanol, which promises to lessen the country's dependence on imported crude oil. A critical assessment of the situation is not out of place. The government would say it is the right time to discuss the issues, but vulnerabilities only come to light during a crisis.

Take the issue of the strategic petroleum reserves (SPR). In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Suresh Gopi informed the House that of the 5.33 million metric tonnes capacity, the existing buffer is 3.37 million metric tonnes. Even at full capacity, the reserves would last only 9.5 days. However, the picture improves when the reserves of the oil marketing companies are included, which raises the reserve capacity to 74 days.

We should ask why the government's reserves are at 64% of their capacity. Governments usually follow the policy of 'don't ask, don't tell'. The minister referred to the stated plans to expand the strategic reserves' capacity by an additional 6.5 million metric tonnes. That is, the total capacity would rise to about 11.8 million metric tonnes. The expansion plan was finalised in July 2021, but progress has been limited.

Is this the time to press the government for answers on sensitive issues? Yes, because energy security, and consequently the SPR, are matters demanding urgent attention. According to estimates, the US has the largest reserves of 740 million barrels, and China is estimated to have 400 to 900 million barrels. Two other major countries with large strategic reserves are Japan and South Korea, with about 500 million and 200 million barrels, respectively. Irrespective of the West Asia war, the need for enhanced strategic reserve capacities was real. India's existing SPR



capacity is about 39.36 million barrels. This is set to more than double, reaching about 86.49 million barrels, but only after the expansion programme is completed.

One of the possible reasons for overlooking the need to maintain and expand strategic reserves could be the availability of Russian crude imports at a discounted price. Russia's share in India's crude oil imports has remained around 35%; it fell from 36.5% in 2024 to 31.5% in 2025. But it peaked again to 35% in November 2025. The presence of the US as a source of crude oil imports has added a layer to India's import landscape. In November 2025, the US' share in India's crude imports touched a high of 12.6% from 4.2% in October 2025 and 5.1% in November 2024. Easing sanctions on Russian and Iranian crude could further increase India's comfort level for oil imports. However, it has also been noticed that India's dependence on imports is increasing.

When India has a choice in importing from multiple sources, it makes sense to shore up its strategic reserves and increase its storage capacity to optimal levels. This requires a long-term view of the oil market, looking beyond the fluctuating price levels.

The transition will be long

The government's long-term thinking seems to be focused on increasing the share of renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and nuclear. It is pursuing this objective while proportionately decreasing its precarious dependence on oil and natural gas imports. But there is no easy way to switch from dependence on fossil fuels to renewable sources. There are issues involving technology and costs to which no easy solutions can be found. The growing share of renewables in India's installed capacity must now translate into everyday applications. This is achievable only by making these sources more user-friendly. Coal, the old dependable, appears to be a ready alternative, at least as a medium-term option, while the oil prices stabilise.

Managing the energy basket despite the diversity of sources requires tact and informed strategic management. The temptation to grab the easy options remains irresistible. If crude oil and natural gas supplies from the Gulf states run into trouble in the aftermath of the war, the alternative is to turn to the Russian and American sources. But these still provide temporary relief. As power demands rise in tandem with the economy, amid increasing climate tensions, the need for assured energy supplies becomes critical. The current churn will take time to settle, but the existing uncertainties should not distract India from its major energy imperative: building robust strategic petroleum reserves, until it enters the ideal world of low carbon and renewables.

(The writer is a Delhi-based journalist and commentator)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The vanishing depth of humour

A society that cannot laugh at itself doesn't become more serious—it becomes brittle

PULLAT RAMACHANDRAN

One of the quieter casualties of our times is humour—not the loud, mocking kind, which thrives, but the deeper kind that includes the ability to laugh at oneself. Somewhere along the way, we have mistaken making fun of others for having a sense of humour.

The difference is not trivial; it is essential. The space for discourse has shrunk. We talk more than ever, yet we no longer converse. We do not speak to one another, but at one another. Conversation has become performance; debate, a contest of declarations. In such a climate, humour—especially the self-deprecating kind—finds little room to survive.

Laughter requires looseness, proportion, and a willingness to appear foolish. A friend of mine, Elsa, calls such moments *oolatharams*—a Malayalam colloquialism for 'silliness', though it can mean less flattering things.

A college anecdote captures this neatly. As part of ragging, a first-year student was forced to present a play in Hindi at an inter-college festival, under threat of consequences. His handicap was simple—he barely knew the language.

When the curtain rose, the setting was a doctor's clinic. The "doctor", in hesitant Hindi, asked, "*Aapka naam kya hai* (What is your name)?" The patient replied, "Kunniraman." Without missing a beat, the doctor said, "Oh, you're a Malayali," and conducted the rest in fluent Malayalam.

No apology, no explanation—just presence of mind and an embrace of limitations. The absurdity became the joke. The ordeal ended. That is humour: not aggression or cleverness, but self-awareness.

A similar quality appears in another story. A man walked into a crucial job interview, tripped on a crease in the carpet, and fell flat before a panel. He rose, dusted himself off, and said, "Well, I suppose I've fallen into good company." What matters is this: presence of mind flows from not taking embarrassment too seriously.

Its absence is stark in public life. Television debates are conducted from a bully pulpit. Anchors ask if one is "with the nation", as though disagreement were disloyalty, and speak as if they represent millions: "The nation wants to know." It is a tone that wounds, humiliates, and destroys reputations.

What passes for reporting is breathless and unmeasured—an attempt to compress words into time, drowning dissent through sheer volume. Decibels have replaced thought. Calmness is treated as weakness and listening as surrender.

One wonders whether R K Laxman, holding up his quiet mirror, would survive this climate without offending someone. The problem is not offence; it is fragility.

At the core of this frenzy lies a deficit of humour. For humour demands perspective, restraint, and the ability to see oneself as fallible. It cannot coexist with manufactured outrage or permanent righteous indignation.

A society that cannot laugh at itself doesn't become more serious—it becomes brittle. And when we lose the ability to speak with one another, we inevitably lose the ability to laugh together.

That is not decline announced; it is decline ignored.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM's call for cooperation rings hollow

The Prime Minister's call for Centre-state cooperation to address the West Asia crisis lacks conviction, given his party's differential treatment of opposition-ruled states. His emphasis on "double engine *sarkar*" undermines cooperative federalism and democracy. His appeal for cooperation rings hollow, and appears to be a desperate attempt to navigate the current crisis rather than a genuine effort to reform Centre-state relations. It is imperative that the Centre treats all states equally, regardless of the ruling party. The prime minister must understand that co-operation cannot be invoked only in times of crises. If India's democracy is to remain vibrant, respect for its federalism and cooperation at all times is imperative.
V Padmanabhan, Bengaluru

Stifled housing dreams

The escalating Iran-Israel and US conflict is waving a red flag for India's real estate sector, with rising energy costs threatening to derail affordable housing initiatives. Developers are currently cushioning the blow with inventory but this is a temporary dam against a fiscal flood. The government's inaction will lead to project stalls and a home-ownership crisis, disproportionately affecting the middle class. The government should consider reducing excise duties on petroleum products and grant infrastructure status to the housing sector to lower borrowing costs.
Vijaykumar H K, Raichur

Bearing the brunt

Apropos 'West Asia crisis: India's economic stress test' (Mar 29), most countries, including India, are paying the price although they have little to do with the war in West Asia. The crisis has snapped supply lines for crude and petroleum products, impacting India's economy. The government's relief measures, such as reducing excise duty on petrol and diesel, may not be enough to mitigate the effects of prolonged conflict. India's economic indices are likely to take a hit.
C V Aravind, Bengaluru

Ugly side of elections

As elections approach, we witness the usual suspects – casteism, freebies, and money power – playing havoc with our democracy. It is quite amusing to see parties vociferous about secularism selecting candidates based only on caste/religion and money and muscle power. Political parties prioritise winning over serving the people, undermining the very fabric of our democracy. The Election Commission must take stringent action to curb malpractices and ensure free and fair elections.
V S Ganeshan, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

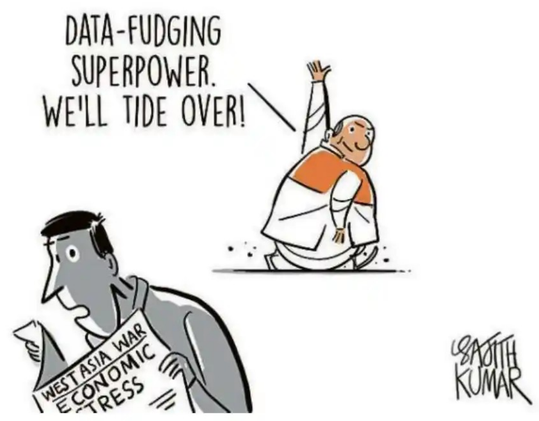
DMK's manifesto has always been a 'hero'; this time it is a 'superstar'.

M K Stalin, Tamil Nadu CM

Some things sound better if they don't come from you.

Joyce Rachelle

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

Toll rising, yet no anti-torture law

Between 2018 and 2021, not a single police official was convicted for custodial deaths

ABHISHEK RATH

A consensus has long existed in the international community around the fact that torture is a wholly untenable practice that can never be justified under any circumstances. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reflects this view by placing an absolute prohibition on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Yet, unfortunately, torture continues to remain an inextricable component of the penal culture of our country. As stated by the Minister of State for Home Affairs in Parliament in 2021, India recorded custodial deaths of 11,419 people from 2016-17 to 2021-22, i.e. over five persons per day. Institutions ranging from the Supreme Court to the Law Commission to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) have expressed frustration at the persisting prevalence of torture and have laid down prescriptions to prohibit the practice. However, these directives have done little to curb it.

To tackle a problem of such magnitude and persistence, the necessity of a special law has been weighed many times. However, such legislation continues to elude us. The Prevention of Torture Bill, 2010, lapsed in the Rajya Sabha after getting passed in the Lok Sabha, and since then, no such law has been introduced in Parliament despite the Law Commission proposing a draft bill in 2017. In 2019, the Supreme Court too declined a petition that requested the court to direct Parliament to pass an anti-torture law. Moreover, the definition of torture in the 2010 bill was significantly narrower than the one provided under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), exclusively covering instances involving the extraction of confession and leaving out torturous punishment and mental torture from its ambit. Furthermore, the bill provided for a limitation period of six months for filing a complaint alleging torture. There is, thus, a critical need for expansive central legislation prohibiting torture for a number of reasons.

First, enacting an anti-torture law would be a crucial step towards fulfilling an important international obligation. Despite being a signatory to the UNCAT since 1997, India has not ratified the convention yet. This is an inexplicable omission, as firstly, India has signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which places an absolute prohibition on torture, and secondly, such prohibition is also universally regarded as a *jus cogens* obligation binding on all states. In addition to being a step towards the realisation of an international obligation that's long overdue, a law that incorporates the expansive protections contained in the UNCAT would go a long way in checking police brutality in all its forms.

Secondly, existing safeguards in the legal framework have not been very effective. Although confessions given to the police in custody carry no evidentiary value, it is almost standard protocol for the police to coercively extract confessions. As far as the IPC is concerned, the term 'torture' is nowhere defined. Moreover, the purview of the provisions that purportedly govern torture, namely Sections 330 and 331, is restricted to situations covered under custodial interrogation alone, such as the extraction of confessions. This leaves out abuse and cruel treatment suffered at the hands of the police in a number of contexts outside custodial interrogation. These include staged encounters, extra-legal punishments and mistreatment in prisons. An effective anti-torture law must also cover these forms of rights violations that often do not find redress through the usual routes of the criminal justice system.

Thirdly, at present, there is a lack of a framework to affix accountability for public officials engaging in acts of torture. As per NCRB data, from 2018 to 2021, no police official was convicted for custodial deaths. Excessive and high-handed police action enjoys tacit institutional support across the criminal justice system, giving rise to a culture of impunity among police officials. Following allegations of custodial torture, crucial steps such as judicial inquiry and a transparent autopsy procedure are often not adhered to. Departmental inquiries by the police serve as exercises in whitewashing. The NHRC too seldom takes a proactive approach in pursuing investigations of torture despite possessing the requisite power. A prospective anti-torture law must provide for an independent oversight mechanism and impose binding obligations on authorities to ensure the transparent investigation and prosecution of public officials.

Torture has long been entrenched in our criminal justice system, resulting in unconscionable injustice and institutionalised rights violations. It is, therefore, time to take concrete steps towards putting an end to it through an effective law that ensures the meaningful realisation of human rights, safeguards the dignity of detainees and fosters a culture of accountability.

(The writer is a research fellow with the Justice, Access and Lowering Delays in India —JALDI—team at Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy)

Governments stepping in to create social media safety nets

D MANJUNATH

Recent reports that the central government is considering placing restrictions on social media access for children below 16, even as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have enacted such laws, come in the wake of similar efforts elsewhere. At the World Government Summit in Dubai in February, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced that Spain will ban access to social media for those under sixteen. Prefacing this with "Our children are exposed to a space they were never meant to navigate alone," he argued that they do not have the option of switching off from social media. In December 2025, Australia mandated (some) digital platforms to take 'reasonable steps' to deny accounts to children below sixteen and delete, not merely deactivate, their existing accounts. Platforms have to comply while not using government IDs as proof of age. The onus of compliance is on the platform, using suitable age-determining technologies. The Spanish law will perhaps also have similar provisions.

Organised attempts to wean children from social media have been gaining ground. Several countries, including South Korea, Brazil, France, Singapore and several states in the United States, have banned or severely restricted the use of smartphones in schools. Britain requires platforms to run the highest privacy settings for children under eighteen. Singapore mandates the App Store and Play Store to prevent minors from accessing age-inappropriate apps.

The legislations in Australia and Spain, which will operate at the intersection of law enforcement, technology, and perhaps social engineering, are bold experiments. Placing the onus of determining a user's age on the platform has, predictably, drawn pushback from all and sundry. 'Assault on free speech,' difficulty of enforcement and negative impact on digital literacy are some of the attack lines that have been trotted out. Lawmakers, however, are aware of these challenges and appear prepared; their stated objective of introducing friction to social media access seems achievable. The platforms' plea for more study and care in crafting legislation seems ironic; if "move fast and break things" can be the motto for the goose (company), it can be the motto for the gander (legislation).

There is increasing, arguably overwhelming, empirical evidence of the negative impact of social media on cognition, educational achievement, and happiness, especially among children. Jonathan Haidt, Stern School psychologist and professor of business, is among those sounding the alarm. In *Anxious Generation*, he makes the case that smartphones and social media have been harmful to young women by making them more prone to anxiety and to young men by making them more afraid to step into the 'real world'.

The introduction of the front-facing camera in the smartphone—the ability to take selfies—is considered an inflection point in this behavioural trend. It is tempting to draw a parallel with Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*, published during his fight for increased automobile safety in the 1960s. This played a major role in changing public expectations and corporate culture towards safety. During this fight, the pushback by General Motors, their attempts to discredit him (not his findings), and later public acceptance of his claims and demands are evocative.

Another Stern School professor, Scott Galloway, is critical of the business model of these companies, characterising them as being built on enragement, the easiest pathway to engagement. He argues that algorithm-induced engagement on these platforms is similar to habit-forming consumption of tobacco and drugs. Strongly disagreeing with the claim that Big Tech is too complex to be regulated, he advocates increased barriers on social media for the young, much like in the legislation mentioned earlier. Echoing this, Vivek Murthy, former US Surgeon General, argues that social media is a public health emergency and advocates use of warning labels on social media platforms akin to that on tobacco products. Courts and juries in California and New Mexico, among others, appear to be seeing the parallel and are awarding damages to plaintiffs against social media platforms. Therein lies another parallel from recent history.

Cigarettes were designed to efficiently deliver the nicotine kick; their advertisements targeted teenagers expecting to acquire lifelong consumers. Public health advocates had to point to numerous studies about the linkage of tobacco use to cancer and also dig up studies by the companies themselves to convince governments and the public about tobacco's health risks. Perhaps *déjà vu* all over again.

Tristan Harris, a former Google developer and co-founder of the Centre for Humane Technology, calls for ethical development and putting guardrails by design to the use of social media. Perhaps that is a bit too much to expect; a company that started out with "Don't be evil" driving its employees' code of conduct has diluted it beyond recognition.

Vivek Murthy's demand that 'safety by design' should be legislated is achievable. An important aspect of the algorithms used by these companies is a performance score (also called an 'objective function') that is optimised. Carefully choosing this score so as not to do evil is possible. Competitive pressures make that hard. Legislation seems like an option worth trying. Even if it is done a little too fast and may seem to break a few things.

(The writer teaches at IIT-Bombay. Views are personal)

A wave of attacks across West Asia shows that Iran has not lost the capacity to retaliate

NICHOLAS KULISH, HELENE COOPER, ISABEL KERSHNER AND ERIKA SOLOMON

Emergency responders at the site of a strike in the town of Eshtaol, Israel, on Saturday. NYT

A toothless Iran? Strikes show it can still inflict pain

An Iranian strike on a US military base in Saudi Arabia, injuring two dozen troops. Two drones targeting a port in Oman, and a strike on the Kuwait International Airport. Workers at an aluminium facility in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, wounded by a missile and drone attack.

President Donald Trump has said that the United States has all but obliterated Iranian military capabilities, portraying Iran as a defanged adversary. The US military says that the number of attacks Iran has launched has declined by roughly 90% from the opening days of the war, and the Israeli military says it has rendered roughly 70% of Iran's hundreds of missile launchers inoperable.

But a series of attacks against Israel and Persian Gulf countries in the past several days is only the latest evidence that Iran retains enough missiles and drones to destabilise the region and inflict a punishing cost on its foes, while signalling that, contrary to Trump's declarations, it is still very much in the fight.

Millions of Israelis are still rushing into bomb shelters day and night to take cover from Iranian missile fire. The daily routine of sirens and booms sows fear and paralysis. Seven people were injured in central Israel on Thursday following missile barrages, according to the country's emergency service. Surveillance video captured footage of two people rushing out of harm's way before a silver car they were standing near exploded then pinwheeled through the air. On Friday, a Tel Aviv man was killed by a bomblet from a missile with a cluster-munition warhead.

Even when Iranian weapons are intercepted, they can still inflict damage. Two people were killed in Abu Dhabi on Thursday when they were struck by shrapnel falling from an intercepted missile.

The US-Israeli campaign has been very effective in attacking Iran's leadership, killing many of them and destroying many military installations, and it has almost completely destroyed its air force and navy, said Farzin Nadimi, a security analyst at The Washington Institute who specialises in Iran and the Persian Gulf.

"In terms of optics, a sunken navy, totally obliterated air force is very important as a metric for victory," he said. "But we all understand that the main metrics of success for Iran is to be able to continue to fire ballistic missiles and drones at Israel, at US bases and Gulf countries. And we know that they have still been able to do that."

Iran still likely possesses thousands of Shahed drones and could still have hundreds of ballistic missiles despite American and Israeli strikes over the past four weeks, one US official said. But the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss military capabilities, cautioned that it is impossible to know for sure, as US intelligence on Iranian capability is limited.

Public statements from the US military have been carefully worded. For instance, Admiral Brad Cooper, commander of the US Central Command, said on Wednesday that "Iran's drone and missile launch rates are down 90%," courtesy of American and Israeli strikes. That is not the same thing as saying those strikes have eliminated 90% of Iranian drones and missiles.

Kelly A Grieco, senior fellow at the Stimson Centre, a foreign affairs research institute in Washington, says the number of strikes may not matter as much as how effectively Iran is using its arsenal.

Grieco has analysed open-source data on Iran's salvos and, while cautioning that the numbers are inexact, found that Iran's hit rate has increased as the war has progressed, more than doubling since March 10.

"Adversaries adapt," Grieco said. "There are signs here that we don't have a defeated adversary and that we may have one that's adapting and learning and doing enough damage to implement its strategy."

The US military may have mistaken reduced activity for reduced capacity. Iran could have been firing fewer missiles and drones because it was repositioning them, she said, not because they were destroyed. The Iranians may have been slowing their pace of attack as they integrated new intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance information into their targeting decisions.

"This administration is very fixated on bombs dropped and on how much the strike volume is down for Iran. They love to say the 90% number," Grieco said. "Is that number obscuring that there has been a shift in Iran's approach?"

The wave of Iranian strikes showed no signs of letting up this weekend, with missiles and drones causing damage across the Gulf region, disabling a radar at the Kuwait airport and injuring a worker and damaging a crane at the Omani port. And the willingness of the Houthis to strike at Israel on Saturday suggests more firepower will be brought to bear against Iran's enemies.

While Israel's military says its air defences have managed to intercept the vast majority of the ballistic missiles, Iran struck a symbolic blow last weekend when one crashed into the southern desert city of Dimona, barely 10 miles from Israel's nuclear research facility and reactor, one of its most protected sites, injuring dozens.

Iran has also found an apparent chink in Israel's armour by firing ballistic missiles with cluster-munition warheads at population centres that break open above ground, then disperse dozens of small bomblets across several miles.

The bomblets generally cause much less damage than a missile with a single large explosive charge, though on some occasions they have proved deadly.

The optimal way to neutralise such missiles is to intercept them above the atmosphere, where parts of the wreckage can burn up harmlessly, officials and experts said. Israel's Arrow 3 interceptors that operate at such high altitudes are costly and in short supply, while lower-tier interceptions may not be able to stop the missiles before their warheads release their payload.

Iran's capacity for retaliation during this war represents a quick recovery from the 12-day assault that Israel launched against it in June. After that round, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israel had achieved "a historic victory" that would "stand for generations." Iran's ballistic missile production capability had been "destroyed," the prime minister said.

If Israel had underestimated anything, analysts said, it was the speed with which Iran had begun to rebuild that capacity.

Like Israel, Iran did not sit idle after the June war but used the time to prepare for the next conflict.

"They had nine months, like we had, to sit and plan," said Miri Eisin, a retired Israeli colonel. Iran's capabilities were, and are, being "degraded" and "diminished," which she said is as much as can be achieved in weeks of combat.

"Even though the US and Israelis have been pounding Iranian missile bases, staging areas, some factories, warehouses, they still have been able to launch missiles at a considerable number — around 20 to 30 missiles" a day, Nadimi of The Washington Institute said of the Iranians. "Some of them are very large liquid fuel or missiles that have a noticeable footprint before they are launched. And they still have been able to do that."

That suggests, analysts said, that Iran has maintained access to the tunnels that lead to its underground "missile cities" and drone storage warehouses. Or, that the Iranians have secret missile bases that have managed to evade detection from US and Israeli intelligence efforts — though Nadimi said he thought that was less likely.

The New York Times

Power sans scrutiny: Why people rush to godmen and gurus

SUMIT PAUL

Ashok Kharat—"Captain Kharat", godman, seer, and, according to a complaint lodged with the Nashik police, a serial rapist—was arrested recently. Investigators reportedly found 58 videos featuring women on a pen drive in his possession. He is currently in police custody.

The complaint, filed by a 35-year-old woman at Sarkarwada Police Station in Nashik, alleges that Kharat gained her trust by claiming divine powers. Now the eternal question that arises is, why do people repeatedly fall into the trap of godmen, babas and astrologers?

The perceived spiritual halo surrounding such figures often shields them from scrutiny. They enjoy a degree of immunity from censure, aided by religio-scriptural sanction that confers upon them an aura of 'divinity'. People's collective lack of scientific temper and irrational faith in superstitions—astrology, black magic, and clairvoyance—make many vulnerable to unscientific thinking and unfounded beliefs.

Many godmen, self-styled high priests and occult practitioners are dubious characters, but their followers, too, play a role. By creating an image of inviolability around these figures, devotees often psychologically exonerate them, even when faced with allegations of wrongdoing, including sexual misconduct.

Despite widespread scepticism about gurudom, priesthood and astrology, people continue to fall prey to such figures. Psychologists note that when followers invest complete faith in an individual, even anomalous behaviour tends to be overlooked. This constant overlooking emboldens the godmen, priests and cult leaders. Scandals involving clergy across religions—including well-documented cases within sections of the Catholic Church—show how institutional sanctity can be misused. Yet, many believers and followers continue to defend these 'holy' people. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's idea of the "willing suspension of disbelief" seems apt here.

Blind faith sustains the influence of godmen, priests and astrologers. Astrology, in particular, continues to command wide acceptance in India, cutting across levels of education. Astrologers, tarot card readers, numerologists and soothsayers are frequently featured in mainstream media, and their opinions are sought on matters of consequence. This is shocking and alarming. This attention, and subsequent normalisation, lends legitimacy to questionable people and practices.

Individuals like Ashok Kharat thrive in such an environment, gaining wealth, access and influence. They often attract followers who are emotionally and socially vulnerable. What is evident is that such figures are adept at exploiting trust.

While it would be inaccurate to suggest that all religious figures are predatory, there is enough evidence across contexts and religions to show that positions of unquestioned authority can be abused, particularly where accountability is non-existent or weak.

A related issue is the myth of enforced celibacy as a marker of spiritual purity. The expectation that 'holy' individuals are devoid of physical desire creates a false moral pedestal. Public condemnation of sexuality often coexists with private transgressions—a contradiction that has surfaced repeatedly in scandals across faiths.

Our religio-psychological dependency and unflinching faith make organised spirituality very productive. At the same time, the proximity of babas, gurus, priests and *pujaris* to politicians makes the matters worse. So, such patronage enables dubious gurus and 'numerologists' to thrive with a comforting sense of unmitigated freedom and protection. Ashok Kharat, too, reportedly built and strengthened access to Maharashtra's political elite before his arrest.

As long as fear of religion and god, and unquestioning belief persists, such figures will continue to emerge and flourish. Like water hyacinths, they may be removed periodically, but they return--exploiting timid followers and feeding off vulnerability and blind faith.

(The author is a Pune-based independent writer and columnist)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: MARCH 1976

Parliament okay for foreign fund flow Bill

New Delhi, March 29
Parliament's approval was today accorded to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Bill, when the Lok Sabha passed it after a four-hour debate. The Bill, already passed by the Rajya Sabha, sought to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or hospitality by certain persons or associations so as to ensure that foreign money did not pollute the political and social life of the country. Deputy Home Minister F. H. Mohsin said the Government's intention was not to ban *bona fide* foreign contributions but to ensure that the money was utilised for the purpose for which it had been received.

25 YEARS AGO: MARCH 2001

BJP plans code of ethics for elected leaders

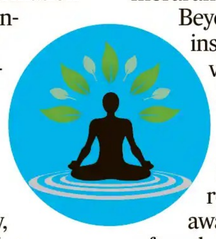
New Delhi, March 29
Reflecting the post-*Tehelka* churning within the organisation, BJP President K Jana Krishnamurthi today said the party would formulate a code of ethics for its elected representatives and keep vigil over BJP ministers wherever it was in power. While accepting that one or two members at the national executive meeting had sought resignation of his predecessor Bangaru Laxman from Rajya Sabha, new party president ruled out expulsion of Mr Laxman saying "since he had voluntarily stepped down from the office of party president, we will leave it at that".

OASIS | NAGASHREE M C

Timeless Jainism in a changing world

About 2,600 years ago, Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankar, preached a timeless message rooted in truth, non-violence, non-greed, non-attachment, and chastity. His teachings emerged during an era marked by turbulence and conflict. Across civilisations, wars were fought fiercely–between the Greeks and the Persians, modern Iranians, and in regions spanning Italy, China, the Middle East, and India. The violence brought immense suffering to societies.

Over the centuries, the nature of warfare has evolved dramatically. Physical combat gave way to artillery, which was later replaced by fighter planes, and today, conflicts are increasingly driven by unmanned drones and advanced technologies. While the weapons of war have transformed, human nature has remained strikingly constant. Societies continue to bear the consequences of misinformation spread by leaders, violent confrontations driven by power struggles, and an ever-growing greed for wealth and attachment to land and material possessions.



The values emphasised by Tirthankar Mahavira—honesty, kindness, simplicity, detachment, and self-restraint—have endured as guiding principles for peace and harmony. He talked about these ideals not as abstract philosophies but practical ways for everyday living, communicated in Prakrit, the language of the common people. These teachings remind us of true progress that lies not merely in artificial intelligence and economic progress but in moral and spiritual growth.

Beyond his teachings, Mahavira inspired devotees to live these values daily. The difference between monks and others lies not in principles, but in the depth of practice. Their fasting is more rigorous, reflecting restraint that builds awareness and compassion for others. Groups of young men and women embrace fasting with joy and devotion, seeking self-realisation within the bounds of their many roles—as family members, breadwinners, community participants, and citizens of India.

No matter how small the desire for self-realisation, Jainism recognises the importance of starting with simple steps and following up with steady efforts toward becoming a better human being. Over time, these small steps can lead one closer to the ideal state that the faith upholds, the state achieved by very few like the Tirthankaras and the very state which is depicted in the statue of Gommateshwara.

Even today, many—young and old—embrace ascetic paths with quiet conviction. Their serenity and inner strength set a powerful example, showing that simplicity and self-restraint can coexist with purpose and fulfilment. In an age of excess, they remind us of enduring values and inspire hope for a peaceful, harmonious world.

Degrees without jobs: J&K's youth caught between promise, reality

There is lowering of expectations for those who chose classrooms over conflict

ZULFIKAR MAJID
SRINAGAR, DHNS

On a grey winter morning in Srinagar, the queue was already snaking along the compound wall of a government office by the time Aamir (name changed) arrived, his breath visible in the cold.

In his hands was a plastic folder heavy with certificates like a master's degree in Political Science, marksheets, identity proofs, and years of quiet hope.

He took his place among hundreds of others. Some clutched engineering diplomas, others science degrees; one said he had a PhD. They had all come for the same thing: a Class-IV government job. No one spoke of qualifications. Only of chances.

In J&K, this quiet lowering of expectations is its own kind of crisis for a generation that chose classrooms over conflict, only to find the promise of education thinning at the edges.

Over the past decade, the Valley has undergone a subtle but significant shift. There is now a quieter vocabulary of exams, cut-offs, and results awaited. But that is colliding with an economy that has not kept pace.

Figures presented in the J&K Assembly this year reveal 77,099 vacant government posts across departments. Yet, lakhs of young people continue to search for work, many overqualified for the few openings that do appear.

The scale of that gap was laid bare in 2020, when more than 5 lakh candidates appeared in interviews for just 8,500 Class-IV posts — over 60 applicants for each position.

Employment, unsurprisingly, became a central promise in the 2024 Assembly elections. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah pledged 1 lakh jobs, a figure that resonated across households where education had become both investment and expectation.

The government has since announced plans to fill around 30,000 vacancies in phases.

The years after 2019 have reshaped not just Kashmir's politics but its administrative rhythms. Recruitment processes have become more centralised, more tightly regulated, and, by many accounts, slower.

That shift—from aspiration to adjustment — runs quietly through the lives of many young Kashmiris. Years are spent preparing for exams that may or may not arrive on time.

The paradox is stark. Dr Farzana Gulzar, an associate professor at the University of Kashmir's Management Studies, told *DH*: "The youth did what was expected, but the system has not created enough pathways for absorption."

3 soldiers injured after service weapon accidentally goes off

SRINAGAR, DHNS: Three soldiers were injured after a service weapon allegedly went off inside an army camp in north Kashmir's Kupwara district, officials said on Sunday, with the army ruling out fratricide and ordering an internal inquiry into the incident.

The incident took place late Saturday night in the Trehgam area, where a soldier's weapon went off inside a barrack, injuring three of his colleagues.

The injured personnel were immediately evacuated to a nearby military hospital and are reported to be in stable condition.

Initial reports had suggested that the soldier may have opened fire on his colleagues, raising suspicion of a fratricide case. However, Army sources later clarified that the incident was the result of an accidental discharge of a weapon, effectively ruling out deliberate firing.

An internal inquiry has been initiated to ascertain the exact sequence of events, including the circumstances under which the weapon discharged and whether standard safety protocols were followed.

There was no immediate official statement from the army's defense public relations officer, but sources said the matter is being treated as a routine operational incident pending the outcome of the probe.

Kupwara remains a high-alert zone with frequent counter-infiltration operations,

T'gana passes Bill to uphold dignity of senior citizens

HYDERABAD, PTI

The Telangana Assembly on Sunday passed the 'Telangana Employees Accountability and Monitoring of Parental Support Bill, 2026,' aimed at ensuring dignity for senior citizens.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said the Bill seeks to go beyond existing central legislation.

He noted that the country already has a national law, the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.

However, the state's new Bill will also cover public representatives and private employees.

The Bill mandates that public representatives, government employees, and private employees care for their elderly parents. Failure to comply will result in a deduction of 15 per cent of the salary or Rs 10,000, whichever is lower, payable to the parents.

Speaking during the discussion, Reddy cited the case of businessman Vijaypat Singhania, who had bequeathed all his assets to his son, only to be later turned out.

"The state government, as a social responsibility, has brought this Bill. It is not like any other legislation. While inculcating moral values among people, if anyone neglects their parents, they should be brought under the purview of the law to ensure they care for them," he said.

Reddy added that it is society's responsibility to correct children who neglect their parents, and termed it unfortunate that the state has to enact such legislation.

According to the CM, those who neglect their parents have no right to live in society.

The legislation clearly delineates the obligations of employees towards the care and maintenance of their parents.

It mandates accountability for ensuring essential aspects of elderly welfare, such as healthcare, housing, and financial security, a press release said.

The provisions also address instances of neglect, establishing mechanisms that enable authorities to intervene and enforce compliance where necessary.

'Possessed' man held for trying to open plane's emergency door

SANJAY PANDEY
LUCKNOW, DHNS

A man allegedly tried to open the emergency door on an IndiGo flight as it was about to land at the Lal Bahadur Shastri Airport in Varanasi on Saturday.

Mohammed Adnan, a resident of the state's Mau district, told the cops that he was "possessed" and had no idea what he was doing.

According to local reports, the incident happened on the IndiGo flight 6E 185 from Bengaluru to Varanasi around 10 pm on Saturday when the plane was about to touch down.

Adnan, who the police said was returning from Goa, reportedly got up from his seat and tried to open the emergency door.

An alert cabin crew member immediately intervened and informed the pilot, who, instead of landing, did a go-around and later landed safely.

Adnan was taken into custody after the plane landed, said the police, adding that during his interrogation, he claimed he did not know what he was doing and that he was "possessed".

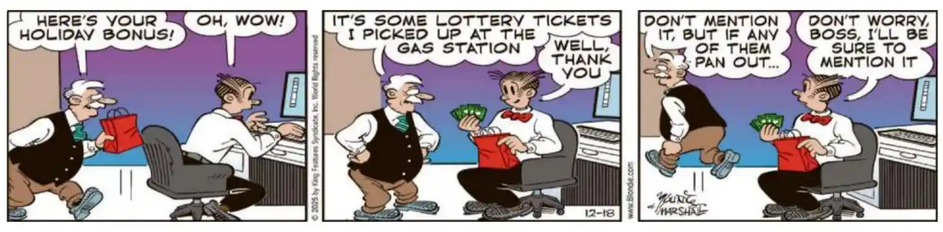
Sources said Adnan had also tried to open the emergency door a few minutes after the flight took off from Bengaluru, but told the crew then that it was done by mistake.

The police said a case had been registered in this regard, and that Adnan's family members had been informed. "We will get him medically examined," said a security official.

MISCELLANY

◆COMICS◆

Blondie


HERE'S YOUR HOLIDAY BONUS!
OH, WOW!
IT'S SOME LOTTERY TICKETS I PICKED UP AT THE GAS STATION
WELL, THANK YOU
DON'T MENTION IT, BUT IF ANY OF THEM PAN OUT...
DON'T WORRY, BOSS, I'LL BE SURE TO MENTION IT

Hagar The Horrible

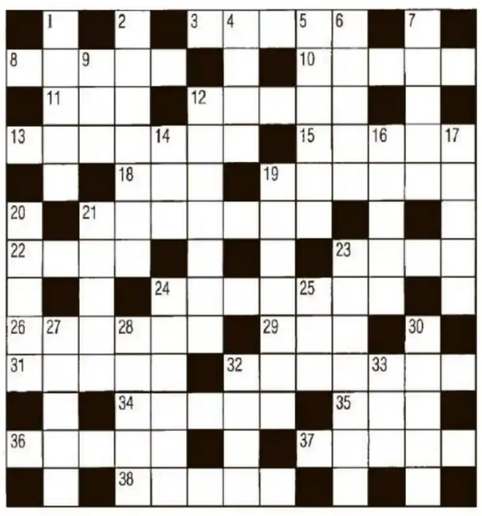
I SEE YOU IN THE SHIELD AND BOAR TAVERN... YOU'RE LOVING THE FOOD... YOU ORDER MANY COURSES... YOU TELL YOUR FRIENDS IT'S THE MOST DELICIOUS MEAL YOU'VE EVER HAD!
HA! THAT SOUNDS LIKE A PAID ADVERTISEMENT!
MY TENT RENT DOUBLED!
Madame Zoloff

Beetle Bailey

Peanuts

Marvin

CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 12383



CRYPTIC

ACROSS
3 Notes a hundred hits? (5)
8 Morning attire? (3-2)
10 Plucky but unpleasant female? (5)
11 Thanks a lot for the titfer (3)
12 Figure the first mate is beset by contradictions (5)
13 The horse was wounded, but mended (7)
15 Some of the worst arsonists are famous! (5)
18 An incredibly great flier (3)
19 We halt the production of riches (6)
21 Needing money, they strode agitatedly around Birkenhead (7)
22 Water polo, possibly, or other game (4)
23 To do so gets Alfie no end upset! (4)
24 Activate the gum, perhaps (7)
26 Composer of a feature about music production (6)
29 Pantomime cat? (3)
31 She shows Ken possesses a warm heart (5)
32 To become fit is an accessible possibility (7)
34 It's clear that detectives need a bit of luck (5)
35 Salient feature of perjury (3)
36 Greatly exclamatory novelist? (5)
37 The mettle, we hear, of a man of iron? (5)
38 Tessa arranges the chairs (5)

DOWN
1 Admit you need money to go to college (3,2)
2 In this, one truly was in the cart (7)
4 Heaved outside when attention's needed (4)
5 Clever sheets of writing (6)
6 A foreign saint (5)
7 Wear for fun? (5)
9 The bill for some table wines? (3)
12 Not much of an army, but Caesar had one (7)
14 Highball! (3)
16 A chap to exclude, however saintly (5)
17 For protective cover, she has £50 (5)
19 The cow's tail remained wrenched (7)
20 Spot a skinhead getting a kiss (5)
21 One generously putting a bit of money in the door? (5)
23 Bringers of ultimate strife to their men? (7)
24 Minuet, possibly, in waltz time? (6)
25 Youngster going to the West End (3)
27 Keep the eggs warm (as in the kitchen?) (5)
28 Slept restlessly in animal skins (5)
30 Fishy Dickensian house? (5)
32 Giver of a bright look to two army men? (4)
33 One part in a brace, perhaps (3)

ACROSS
3 Wild (5)
8 Fact (5)
10 Lowest point (5)
11 Waste container (3)
12 Lawful (5)
13 Advantage (7)
15 Be worthy of (5)
18 Corpulent (3)
19 One's professional life (6)
21 Burial or cremation (7)
22 Burst of noise (4)
23 Corrode (4)
24 Rifle attachment (7)
26 Introduce gradually (6)
29 Auction item (3)
31 Looks lasciviously (5)
32 Health-check (7)
34 Book of maps (5)
35 Stick, shaft (3)
36 Natural ability (5)
37 Tree (5)
38 Hangman's halter (5)

DOWN
1 Highland games log (5)
2 Melodious (7)
4 Give or send forth (4)
5 Brutish person (6)
6 Afterwards (5)
7 The southern US (5)
9 Can (3)
12 Word for word (7)
14 Sports supporter (3)
16 Refute (5)
17 Hackneyed (5)
19 Wheedles (7)
20 Month (5)
21 Untrue (5)
23 No longer working (7)
24 Small restaurant (6)
25 Signal agreement (3)
27 Recently (5)
28 Coach (5)
30 Aircraft detection system (5)
32 Main part or majority (4)
33 Fish (3)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 2673

ACROSS: 1 Demure, 4 Davis Cup, 9 Nearby, 10 Cape Horn, 12 Fourfold, 13 Kirsch, 15 Reef, 16 Tearjerker, 19 Rip-roaring, 20 With, 23 Patron, 25 High seas, 27 Turnover, 28 Bridge, 29 Detonate, 30 Celery.

DOWN: 1 Done for, 2 Measure up, 3 Rebuff, 5 Ajar, 6 Itemised, 7 Cross, 8 Panther, 11 Algebra, 14 Frantic, 17 Knife-edge, 18 Go to town, 19 Reputed, 21 Hosiery, 22 Charge, 24 Tarot, 26 Zest.

◆SU-DO-KU-6866◆

				1	3		2	7
		4						6
						1	4	
		9		7	1			
	3		9		4		1	
			3	6		9		
	4	8						
6						5		
9	2		6	4				

medium

SOLUTION TO 6865

8	5	4	6	2	9	7	1	3
3	9	6	7	8	1	4	5	2
1	2	7	5	3	4	9	8	6
7	1	9	2	5	6	3	4	8
2	6	3	4	1	8	5	7	9
4	8	5	3	9	7	6	2	1
9	7	1	8	4	3	2	6	5
5	4	8	9	6	2	1	3	7
6	3	2	1	7	5	8	9	4

To solve the puzzle: To solve a su-do-ku puzzle, every digit from1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows, and in each of the nine boxes.

SCRABBLE™

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J8	S1	E1	R1	T1	L1	M3	RACK 1
E1	S1	V4	E1	I1	P3	N1	RACK 2
N1	S1	S1	L1	A1	E1	U1	Double Word Score / RACK 3
E1	I1	R1	D2	V4	L1	L1	Triple Word Score / RACK 4

PAR SCORE 110-120
by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2- to 7-letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in the Collins English Dictionary. JUDD'S SOLUTION TOMORROW

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

B3 R1 U1 T1 E1 S1	RACK 1 =	8
W4 I1 R1 Y4	RACK 2 =	18
T1 W4 I1 T1 C3 H4 Y4	RACK 3 =	104
A1 R1 M3 I1 N1 G2 S1	RACK 4 =	60
PAR SCORE 125-135	JUDD'S TOTAL	190

JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

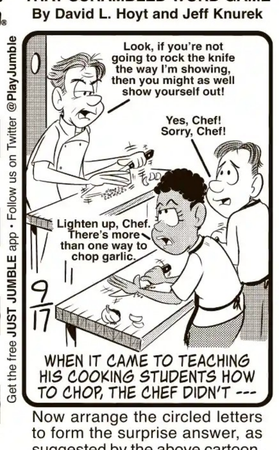
Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

NDYIK

WPTES

EEGRME

MOCNOM


Look, if you're not going to rock the knife the way I'm showing, then you might as well show yourself out!
Yes, Chef! Sorry, Chef!
Lighten up, Chef. There's more than one way to chop garlic.
WHEN IT CAME TO TEACHING HIS COOKING STUDENTS HOW TO CHOP, THE CHEF DIDN'T ---

Get the free JUST JUMBLE app • Follow us on Twitter @PlayJumble

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

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Answer here: _____ _____ (Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: KIOSK MOLDY WISDOM ATTEST
Answer: She'd picked up the book about the history of fat-free milk and — SKIMMED IT

HITORI-3320

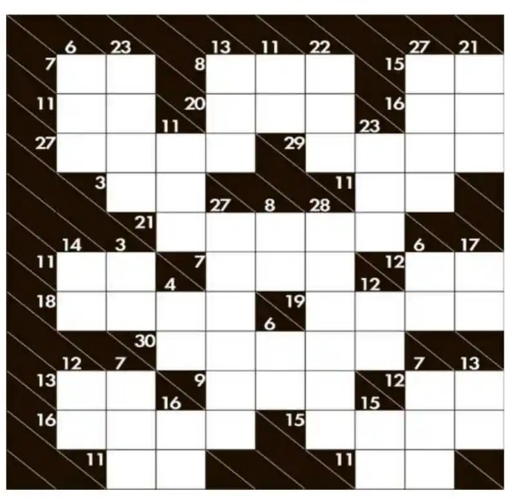
8	1	4	2	7	8	5	8
3	5	2	1	2	6	5	5
6	5	8	2	3	7	4	1
7	3	2	5	2	8	2	4
2	2	5	2	1	2	6	3
4	2	3	6	2	2	1	8
1	6	7	4	5	6	8	2
1	8	6	1	4	5	7	2

To solve the puzzle: Eliminate numbers by filling in squares so that remaining cells in that row or column do not repeat that number more than once. Filled-in cells cannot be horizontally or vertically adjacent. The un-filled cells must form a single component connected horizontally and vertically.

SOLUTION TO 3319

2	6	5	4	7	■	3	1
■	1	■	5	4	3	8	■
6	3	7	■	1	■	4	2
■	5	2	6	■	4	7	■
3	4	■	2	5	6	■	7
■	2	6	7	■	5	1	3
5	■	1	■	6	7	■	4
1	7	4	3	2	■	5	8

KAKURO- 3320



SOLUTION TO 3319

To solve the puzzle: Put a number from 1 through 9 in a cell. No zeros. A number in a cell separated by diagonal line tells the sum of numbers in consecutive cells at its right or downward. No number may appear more than once in consecutive cells.

SU DO KU X - 3870

■			6					■
	■		9			6	3	8
	2	■			7	■		9
4	3		■		6	1		
		2		■		8		
			5	3	■			
2		■			3	■		7
	■		7		1		■	
7					9		2	■

SOLUTION TO 3869

2	3	6	5	9	4	8	1	7
9	4	8	1	7	3	2	6	5
5	1	7	8	6	2	4	9	3
3	2	5	9	8	1	7	4	6
6	8	1	4	5	7	9	3	2
4	7	9	3	2	6	1	5	8
1	5	2	6	4	8	3	7	9
7	9	3	2	1	5	6	8	4
8	6	4	7	3	9	5	2	1

To solve the puzzle: The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.

Pak hosts regional powers for Iran talks, with focus on Hormuz

Countries float proposals to US on maritime traffic, strait reopening

ISLAMABAD/ISTANBUL, REUTERS

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar (2R) with his counterparts Turkey's Hakan Fidan (R), Saudi Arabia's Faisal bin Farhan (2L) and Egypt's Badr Abdelatty before their meeting in Islamabad, on Sunday. AFP

Pakistan hosted talks with Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia on Sunday as part of its efforts to broker an end to the Iran war, with initial discussions focused on proposals to reopen the Strait of Hormuz to shipping, sources familiar with the matter said.

Foreign ministers from the three regional powers landed in Islamabad for the talks as Iran warned the US against launching a ground attack and global oil prices surged amid continued fighting between Iran, the US and Israel.

The countries meeting in Pakistan have floated proposals to Washington tied to maritime traffic and reopening the Strait of Hormuz, five sources familiar with the matter told Reuters, as part of wider efforts to stabilise shipping flows.

The Strait of Hormuz was previously a conduit for about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies, but Iran has effectively halted shipping flows through it in response to the US and Israeli air strikes.

Hormuz proposal

Pakistan, which like Turkey borders Iran, has leveraged its close ties to both Tehran and Washington to emerge as a key diplomatic channel in the conflict, while Ankara and Cairo have also played a role.

A source from Pakistan said proposals, including from Egypt, had been forwarded to the White House by the countries before Sunday's meeting and that they included Suez Canal-style fee structures. Two other Pakistani sources said Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia could form a consortium to manage oil flows through the waterway, and had asked Pakistan to participate. The first Pakistani source said Islamabad had not been formally asked to join and maintains that it will not.

The proposal for a management consortium had been discussed with the US and Iran, the sources said.

Islamabad to hold talks between US and Iran

Pakistan's Foreign Minister on Sunday indicated the prospect of potential talks between the US and Iran to de-escalate the ongoing war, underlining that both countries have expressed their "confidence" in Islamabad to facilitate their talks, reports PTI.

Iran Guards threaten to hit US universities in West Asia

TEHRAN, AFP: Iran's Revolutionary Guard on Sunday threatened to target US universities in the Middle East after saying US-Israeli strikes had destroyed two Iranian universities.

"If the US government wants its universities in the region to be free from retaliation... it must condemn the bombing of the universities in an official statement by 12 noon on Monday, March 30, Tehran time," said the statement by Iranian media.

The statement added: "We advise all employees, professors, and students of American universities in the region and residents of their surrounding areas" stay away from campuses.

Several US universities have campuses scattered throughout the Gulf region, such as Texas A&M University in Qatar and New York University in the UAE.

Netanyahu orders expansion of ops in southern Lebanon

'Decision meant to strengthen Israel's security position'

JERUSALEM, REUTERS

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday he had ordered the military to further expand its operations in southern Lebanon, citing continued rocket fire by Hezbollah.

Israel said last week it was enlarging a "buffer zone" up to the Litani River. It was not immediately clear whether Netanyahu was referring to that area or to the seizure of additional territory.

"I have now instructed to further expand the existing security zone in order to finally thwart the threat of invasion and to push the anti-tank missile fire away from our border," Netanyahu said in a video statement from Israeli Northern Command.

His office declined to provide further details, and the matter has not yet been discussed by the security cabinet.

Last week, Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israeli forces would "control the remaining bridges and the security zone up to the Litani," a river that meets the Mediterranean about 30 km (20 miles) north of Israel's border.

Iran-backed Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel after the United States and Israel launched air strikes on Iran.

More than 400 fighters from Hezbollah have been killed since the Lebanese armed group launched the opening salvoes of a new war with Israel on March 2, sources familiar with Hezbollah's count told Reuters.

Israeli strikes and ground operations have killed more than 1,100 people in Lebanon, including children, women and medical personnel, according to the Lebanese health ministry. It does not otherwise distinguish between civilians and combatants.

The Israeli military has said four of its soldiers have been killed in fighting in southern Lebanon.

Netanyahu said the decision aimed to strengthen Israel's security position along its northern frontier."We eliminated thousands of Hezbollah terrorists, and above all, we eliminated immense threat of 150,000 missiles and rockets that were intended to destroy the cities of Israel," he said.

Iran 30 days into internet blackout, isolating millions

Iran's nationwide internet blackout was on its 30th consecutive day on Sunday, leaving millions cut off from information and communication since the war with the United States and Israel began, reports AFP. "Iran's internet blackout has now entered day 30 as the nationwide censorship measure continues into its fifth week after 696 hours," internet monitoring group NetBlocks said on X on Sunday. While the domestic intranet remains operational access to the global internet has been severely restricted.

Sri Lankan President thanks PM Modi for fuel shipment

COLOMBO, PTI: Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Sunday thanked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for sending an oil shipment to ease the fuel supply disruptions in the Island nation caused by the West Asia conflict.

A shipment of 38,000 MT of fuel, comprising 20,000 MT of diesel and 18,000 MT of petrol, arrived in Colombo on Saturday, as an emergency support through the local operation of Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Lanka IOC (LIOC).

Anura Kumara Dissanayake

"Spoke with PM @narendramodi a few days ago about the fuel supply disruptions Sri Lanka is facing due to the Middle East conflict. Grateful for India's swift support. 38,000 MT of fuel arrived in Colombo yesterday," Dissanayake posted on social media.

The Sri Lankan President also thanked External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for his support.

"My thanks also to EAM @DrSJaishankar for his close coordination", he said.

Earlier, Sri Lanka also held talks with Jaishankar to seek assistance on energy sustainability in view of the volatile situation in West Asia.

The LIOC had requested rescue supplies from India after encountering problems in securing fuel from their Middle Eastern and Singapore suppliers.

Since March 15, Sri Lanka has imposed a quota for fuel to avoid long queues formed by hoarders.

Several who had hoarded fuel were charged in courts in different parts of the country.

WORLD AT A GLANCE

Pope Leo XIV arrives to lead a mass for Palm Sunday at St Peter's square in the Vatican on Sunday. AFP

Indian-origin man held in UK after car rams into pedestrians; 7 hurt

An Indian-origin man has been arrested on suspicion of attempted murder after seven people were seriously injured when a car drove into pedestrians in England, police said on Sunday, reports PTI from London.

The incident occurred on Saturday at 9:30 pm in a city centre street, Friar Gate, Derby, after a car crashed into pedestrians.

The police confirmed that seven people were injured in the incident.

"The car, a black Suzuki Swift, struck several people in Friar Gate at about 9:30 pm on Saturday, 28 March," a statement from Derbyshire police said.

"A man in his 30s, who is originally from India, was found a short time after the incident," it said.

"He remains in police custody," it added.

The city police have still not revealed the identity of the Indian-origin man arrested on suspicion of attempted murder.

The other charges of his arrest include causing serious injury through dangerous driving, inflicting grievous bodily harm with intent, and dangerous driving.

The injured were treated at the scene by ambulance crews and taken to Royal Derby Hospital and Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham.

US court to hear Black inmate case

Certain names will be familiar to the Supreme Court in the latest case involving a Black death row inmate from Mississippi, with arguments set for Tuesday, reports AP from Washington.

Doug Evans, a now-retired prosecutor with a history of dismissing Black jurors for discriminatory reasons, knocked all but one Black person off the jury that tried and convicted Terry Pitchford. Judge Joseph Loper allowed it to happen. The state Supreme Court upheld the conviction.Just 7 years ago, in a case involving the same district attorney, trial judge and state high court, the Supreme Court overturned the death sentence and conviction of Curtis Flowers because of what Justice Brett Kavanaugh described as a "relentless, determined effort to rid the jury of Black individuals."

'Back to the Future' and 'Top Gun' actor James Tolkan dies at 94

NEW YORK, AP: Actor James Tolkan, known for his roles as a cigar-chomping naval commander in "Top Gun" and a gruff high school administrator in "Back to the Future," has died. He was 94.

James Tolkan

Tolkan died Thursday in Lake Placid, New York, where he lived, his booking agent, John Alcantar, said Saturday. A brief obituary published on the "Back to the Future" website said Tolkan died "peacefully," but no cause of death was given.

In "Back to the Future," Tolkan portrayed the bow tie-wearing vice principal Gerald Strickland, who eyeballed students for trouble in the halls of the fictitious Hill Valley High School.

Tolkan also appeared in "Top Gun" as commanding officer Tom "Stinger" Jardian.

Russia concerned with possibility of US taking control of Afghan airbase

MOSCOW, PTI

Moscow is apprehensive that the US could try to take control of a key Afghan Base amid its escalating military conflict with Iran, a senior Russian diplomat has said.

Speaking in an interview with the government news agency RIA Novosti on Saturday, Russian President Vladimir Putin's special envoy on Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said that the US demand for the Bagram airbase is not new.

The Bagram airbase, located near the capital city, Kabul, was built in the 1950s by the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and was widely used by the Soviet forces during their intervention in Afghanistan, and later by the US and Nato forces in operations against the Afghan Taliban.

"The Trump administration constantly voices demands for the return of the Bagram airbase in Afghanistan, which the US lost after their inglorious retreat from Afghanistan in August 2021," Kabulov said.

His response came after he was asked to comment on the possibility of the US renewing its demand to the Afghan regime to access the Bagram airbase in the backdrop of massive US military deployment in West Asia.

Russia does not accept the deployment of US and Nato military facilities and infrastructure in Afghanistan or neighbouring states, he said.

"We hope the authorities of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will continue to adhere to a similar approach," he added.

In September 2025, US President Donald Trump had expressed a desire to regain control of Bagram airbase, a facility abandoned during the 2021 withdrawal, citing its strategic proximity to China.

Trump has repeatedly criticised the Biden administration for abandoning the base.

'No Kings' rallies draw crowds across US and Europe

ST PAUL (MINNESOTA), AP

Demonstrators hold signs during a 'No Kings' protest against US President Donald Trump's administration policies, in New York City. REUTERS

Large crowds protested Saturday against the war in Iran and President Donald Trump's actions in "No Kings" rallies across the US and in Europe.

Minnesota took center stage, with thousands of people standing shoulder-to-shoulder to celebrate resistance to Trump's aggressive immigration enforcement.

Minnesota's flagship event on the Capitol lawn in St. Paul drew Bruce Springsteen as its headliner. He and other speakers praised the state's people for taking to the streets over the winter in opposition to a surge of U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement agents.

Springsteen performed " Streets of Minneapolis," the song he wrote in response to the fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti by federal agents. Springsteen lamented Good and Pretti's deaths but said the state's pushback against ICE has given the rest of the country hope.

"Your strength and your commitment told us that this was still America," he said. "And this reactionary nightmare, and these invasions of American cities, will not stand." People rallied from New York City, with almost 8.5 million residents in a solidly blue state, to Driggs, a town of fewer than 2,000 people in eastern Idaho, a state Trump carried with 66 per cent of the vote in 2024.

Protests were mostly peaceful, but federal authorities deployed tear gas "due to demonstrators throwing large concrete blocks, bottles and other objects" in downtown Los Angeles, police said on the social platform X. LAPD also said protesters were later arrested for failing to disperse.

Rallies overseas

Demonstrations were also planned in more than a dozen other countries, from Europe to Latin America to Australia, according to Ezra Levin, a co-executive director of Indivisible, a group spearheading the events. In countries with constitutional monarchies, people call the protests "No Tyrants," he said.

KARNATAKA POWER TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LIMITED
(CIN: U40109KA1999SGC025521)
No: 941/EEE/OP/KLB/AEE(O)/F-47/2025-26/6096-6100 Date: 27.03.2026

CAUTION NOTICE

KPTCL wants to bring to the notice of the public of all the Taluk of Kalaburagi district, that various 220kV and 110kV EHV overhead Power transmission lines are in charged condition and carrying very high voltage and current in the conductor in and around the Kalaburagi District. The above Transmission lines pass through every taluk of the district and are connected to the following sub-stations for providing power supply viz 400kv Firozabad, 220kV Receiving Station Kapanoor, 220kV Receiving Station Nimbarga (Ganagapur), 110kV sub-station Aland, 110kV sub-station Farhatabad, 110kV sub-station Kadaganchi, 110kV sub-station Kapanoor, 110kV sub-station Madiyal, 110kV sub-station Mahagaon, 110kV sub-station Kalaburagi (North), 110kV sub-station Kalaburagi (South), 110kV sub-station Kalaburagi (University), 110kV sub-station Kalaburagi (west) and 110kV sub-station Nandur Kesaratagi, 110kV sub-station Rudrawadi as well as solar power generators. Hence all the Public of Kalaburagi District are hereby requested to not to touch or go near these towers, not to through wet hay, wet twigs, conductor etc to the Transmission lines, don't tie animals to the Transmission towers or near the towers, planting trees under the Transmission line corridor, construction / temporary shed construction, fixing of pump set starter switch board, tiding of LT wire of pump set cables etc., such type of practices will leads to hazardous to animals as well as human beings and may result in electrocution resulting into fatal/non fatal electrocution leading to interruption of power transmission network. Hence to avoid any electrical accidents the KPTCL is requesting all the general public and consumers to be more careful and take safety precautions under the restricted Transmission line infrastructures and corridors. If any electrical accidents occur due to violation of above hazardous activities, the KPTCL will not be responsible for the risks.

Sd/- Executive Engineer (Elec.), Operation Division,
KPTCL, Prasarana Bhavana, Sedam Road, Kalaburagi.

N Korea conducts engine test for missile capable of targeting US mainland

SEOUL, AP

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspecting a combustion test of a solid-fuel rocket engine at an undisclosed location. AFP

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed a test of an upgraded, high-thrust, solid-fuel engine for weapons and hailed it as a signficant development to boost the country's strategic military capability, state media reported Sunday.

While the test was in line with Kim's stated goal of acquiring more agile, hard-to-detect missiles targeting the United States and its allies, some experts speculate North Korea's claim may be an exaggeration.

The Korean Central News Agency reported Kim watched the ground jet test of the engine using a composite carbon fiber material. It said the engine's maximum trust is 2,500 kilotons, up from about 1,970 kilotons reported in a similar solid-fuel engine test in September.

KCNA reported the test was conducted as part of the country's five-year arms build-up meant to upgrade "strategic strike means," a term referring to nuclear-capable ballistic missiles and other weapons.

Kim said the latest engine test had "great significance in putting the country's strategic military muscle on the highest level," according to KCNA.

KCNA did not report exactly when or where the test occurred.

Former Nepal PM Oli remanded in judicial custody for 5 days

KATHMANDU, PTI: Nepal's former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was remanded in judicial custody for five days by the Kathmandu District Court on Sunday, even as protests continue to erupt in various parts of the country over the arrests.

Oli and former home minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested on Saturday for their alleged involvement in suppressing the Gen Z movement of September 8 and 9 last year, in which 76 people, including around two dozen youths, were killed.

The arrests came a day after the newly formed Balendra Shah government decided to implement the report of the probe commission into the Gen Z protests in its first cabinet meeting. Lekhak was presented before the district court seeking remand for ten days to carry out further investigation into their alleged involvement in the incidents of killings. He was also remanded in custody for five days.

K P Sharma Oli

However, ex-PM Oli virtually attended the district court session due to his deteriorating health conditions, according to Deepak Kumar Shrestha, information officer at the district court. Oli is currently undergoing medical treatment at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu.

He will remain in the hospital during the five-day custody.

BANGALORE DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
T. Chowdaiah Road, Kumara Park West, Bengaluru-560 020
No.: BDA/EM/EE(ID)/TEN/207/2025-26 Date: 30.03.2026

INVITING FOR TENDER (IFT)

(Through GoK e-Procurement platform https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in)

Bangalore Development Authority is inviting tender for below mentioned work:

Sl. No.	Name of work	Approx. cost Rs. in Crores	EMD Rs. in Croes	Tender Processing Fee	Period of completion
1	Construction of Bangalore Business Corridor (Peripheral Ring Road-1) Package-1 from Tumkur Road to Bellary Road (Km 0+0000) to (Km 19.80) inclusive of 10 year O&M on Design, Build, Operate and Transfer (DBOT) mode. (Indent Number: BDA/2025-26/RD/WORK_INDENT237)	3348.05	33.50	As per Karnataka Public Procurement Portal	36 months

Tender Schedule: (1) Tender published date: **06.04.2026. (2)** Last date and time for tender queries is **15.04.2026, 16.00 hrs. (3)** Last date and time for receipt of tenders: **04.05.2026, 16.00 hrs. (4)** Date and time of opening Technical bid: **06.05.2026, 16.30 hrs. (5)** Date and time of opening Finanial bid: **11.05.2026, 16.30 hrs.** Interested bidders can view further details on **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in** and for more details it is requested to contact the Infrastructure Division of BDA during office hours. Helpline / Whatsapp: 9483166622 (24x7) @BDAOfficialGok

Note: The implementation of the project on lands that are subject matter of various writ petitions pending in the Hon. High Court of Karnataka is subject to the outcome of such writ petitions.

Sd/- Engineer Member

BSE (last week)

*Data as of Mar 27

NSE (last week)

*Markets were closed on Thursday due to Ram Navami

TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
LT	3.82%	BEL	-5.00%
HCLTECH	2.22%	RELIANCE	-4.69%
BAJFINANCE	1.68%	TRENT	-4.64%
INFY	1.23%	SBIN	-3.62%
ULTRACEMCO	1.14%	HDFCBANK	-3.10%

TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
ONGC	6.24%	ADANI	-5.40%
L&T	3.76%	BHARAT ELECT	-5.01%
APOLLO HOSP	2.51%	COAL INDIA	-4.93%
HCLTECH	2.30%	RELIANCE IND	-4.69%
BAJFINANCE	1.60%	TRENT	-4.49%

Sensex (52-week)

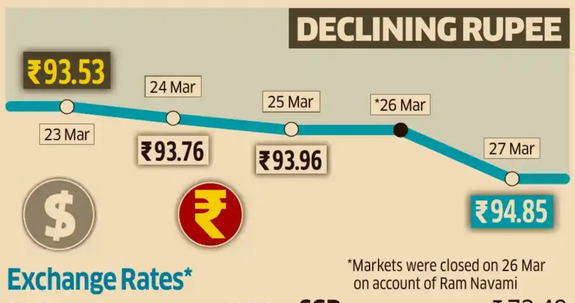
Mar 27, 2025	Mar 27, 2026	
77,606.43	73,583.22	-5.18%

Nifty (52-week)

Mar 27, 2025	Mar 27, 2026	
23,591.95	22,819.60	-3.27%

10-year Bond yield 6.93%

DECLINING RUPEE



Exchange Rates*

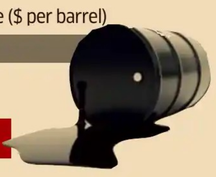
Dollar	₹ 94.85	SGD	₹ 73.49
Pound	₹ 126.19	Yen (100 units)	₹ 59.26
Euro	₹ 109.15		

*Markets were closed on 26 Mar on account of Ram Navami

*Price at which banks sell

Crude Oil Rate ($ per barrel)

BRENT CRUDE
$105.32*
3.37%
*Rate as of Mar 27



Bengaluru fuel pump price*

(Retail)
Petrol* ₹102.55 ₹-0.37%
Diesel* ₹90.65 ₹-0.34%

*Rates as of Mar 28 #Rate change compared with yesterday

Commodity watch

COFFEE

Category	Rate (Rs per 50 kg)*
Arabica Parchment	₹ 22700 - 23100
Arabica Cherry	₹ 12400 - 13800
Robusta Parchment	₹ 17800 - 18300
Robusta Cherry	₹ 9600 - 10400

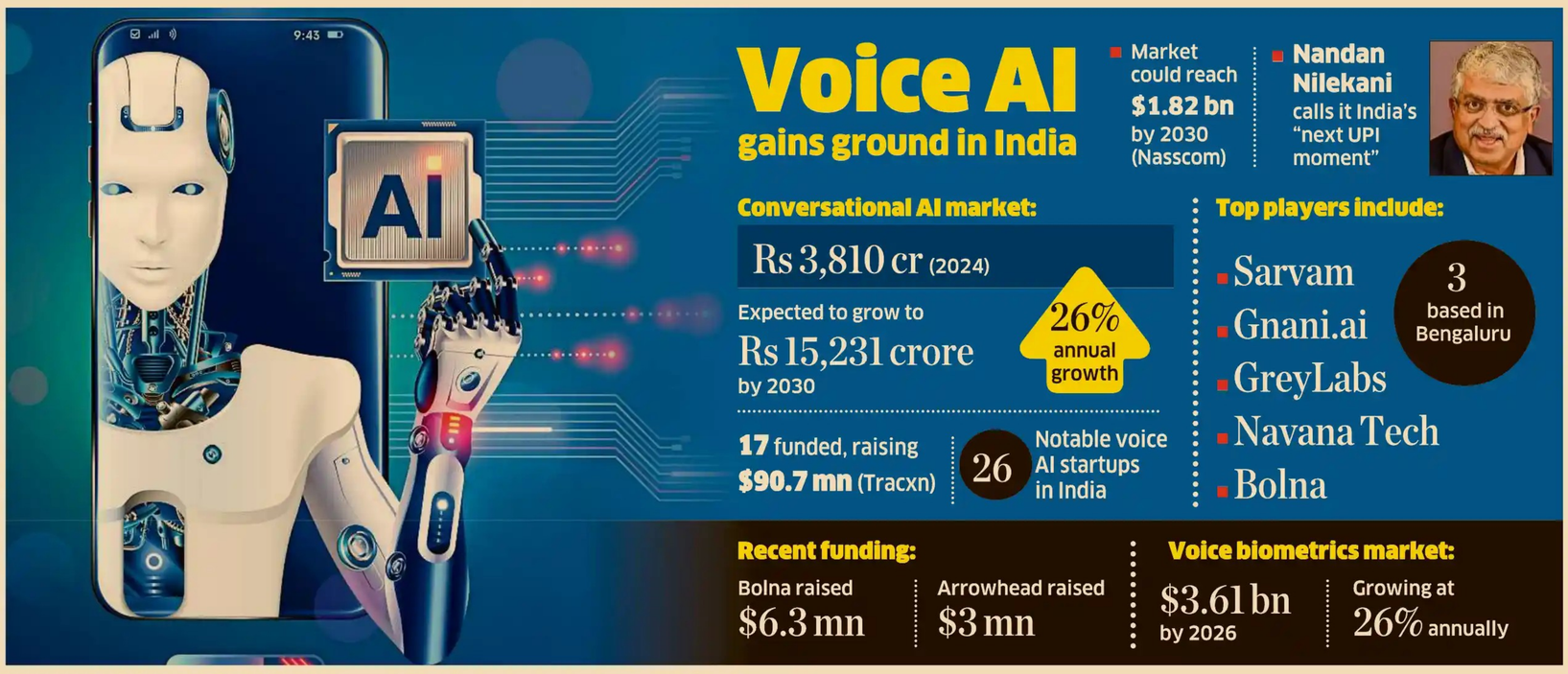
*Rates as on Mar 26

Other Commodities

Silkworm cocoon (Rs per kg)*

Bivoltine (BV)	₹ 737
Cross Breed (CB)	₹ 704

*Average rates as on Mar 27



Voice AI gains ground in India

- Market could reach **$1.82 bn** by 2030 (Nasscom)
- **Nandan Nilekani** calls it India's "next UPI moment"

Conversational AI market:

Rs 3,810 cr (2024)

Expected to grow to **Rs 15,231 crore** by 2030

26% annual growth

17 funded, raising **$90.7 mn** (Tracxn)

26 Notable voice AI startups in India

Top players include:

- Sarvam
- Gnani.ai
- GreyLabs
- Navana Tech
- Bolna

3 based in Bengaluru

Recent funding:

Bolna raised $6.3 mn

Arrowhead raised $3 mn

Voice biometrics market:

$3.61 bn by 2026

Growing at 26% annually

Voice AI: Boon of real-time hands-free interaction

The tech reduces friction, provides improved accessibility and communication

UMA KANNAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

Voice AI is here. From startups to tech giants, every company is now making use of voice-enabled solutions that allow anyone to communicate with ease. With hands-free interaction, gradually sectors such as BFSI, telecom and retail are finding new ways to adopt voice AI.

Last week, Swiggy and Razorpay announced their partnership with Sarvam AI. This partnership with Swiggy will bring multilingual, voice-led commerce to Food Delivery, Instamart and Dineout. Through this, users can place food and grocery in their preferred language by speaking to an AI Assistant. Razorpay will power secure agentic payments via UPI Reserve Pay, for conversational AI journeys.

Companies are now looking forward to the next phase of digital commerce, where conversations will become the interface. Last week, Meesho announced 'Vaani — Your Meesho Dost', which is a GenAI-powered conversational voice shopping assistant.

AI experts said voice AI is the most-important technology today, because it is becoming the most natural interface for humans and technology. "Over 82% of enterprises are already using voice-enabled solutions and the value of the voice assistant market is estimated to be $6.13 billion by 2026 (31% CAGR). This is leading to a shift from screen-first experiences to conversation-first experiences. In addition, nearly 40% of AI systems are multimodal, which means that they use multiple forms of input (i.e. voice, text and visual) in a unified digital experience," Kumar Rajagopalan, Vice-President — Strategic Initiatives and Country Head, India at Dexian, said.

He added that the benefits of voice AI are clear as it reduces friction, provides improved accessibility and allows for real-time hands-free interaction. The BFSI, healthcare, retail, telecom and customer service sectors are all leading the way in the adoption of voice AI. For example, financial services is using voice AI for secure authentication and faster customer resolution, and healthcare is leveraging the same for clinical documentation and patient engagement. The overall voice AI landscape is also continuing to expand rapidly, with estimates suggesting that the global market will grow to tens of billions of dollars within the next decade, Rajagopalan added.

Many startups are also now focusing on voice AI. With many dialects and languages in India, voice AI provides multilingual support across verticals. Recently, at an event organised by EkStep Foundation, Nandan Nilekani, its co-founder and chairperson, said everybody will use voice AI as a utility to improve things, and then "we'll share learning".

Voice is a whole new frontier, simply because there's so much variation, so many dialects. "We speak English or English words liberally between languages that AI should deal with and be able to comprehend and answer," he added.

Recently, at the second edition of the ConvoZen AI Summit 2026, Akhil Gupta, Founder of NoBroker and ConvoZen, explained how voice AI is slowly becoming the next UPI revolution in India, with its ability to reach and communicate with Indians in different dialects.

"For a country like ours, where the majority of the population resides in rural areas, voice-based communication can open a door to commerce that has been closed shut for a long time. The issue has been scalability. There are only so many human agents you can hire to handle calls — but with AI, scalability is no longer an issue. Indians, whether they're living in a metro or a remote village, can access services of any brand just by dialling a number, instead of having to navigate a complex web UI," Anurag Jain, Founder and CEO of Oriserve, said.

Voice AI has been a talking point for a while, but the recent advancements in AI tech [lower latency, lower Word Error Rate (WER), etc.] have now made it possible for it to be deployed at scale and we are seeing great use cases in collections, customer support, and raising installation requests and online shopping to name a few, he added.

What excites Abhinandan Jain, Chief — CX, Growth & Delivery Officer, AIONOS, is that we are finally building technology that understands not just what someone says, but how they feel saying it. "The contact centre industry spent 30 years optimising for speed. The next 10 are about depth. Voice AI is the engine that gets us there," he said.

Explaining sectors that will be most benefited, he said, banking moves the fastest because voice biometrics solve in two seconds what passwords couldn't solve in 30 years.

Apart from banking, healthcare, retail, telecom and education are also seeing accelerated use of voice AI. "The common thread is this: people want to feel like someone is actually there. Voice AI, built right, delivers that at a scale no human workforce alone ever could," he said.

Many startups apart from Gnani.ai and Sarvam AI are revolutionising and rapidly advancing in voice AI. Y-Combinator-backed Bengaluru-based voice AI startup Bolna in January raised $6.3 million in a seed funding round.

Maitreya Wagh, Founder and CEO of Bolna, said, "Voice remains the most-critical channel for enterprises, but migrating from IVR or human-led workflows to voice AI is a long and complex process. Most companies still have to wait weeks for custom-built agents. Our focus is on enabling enterprises to build, test, deploy, and monitor voice AI agents on their own, at scale."

Another Bengaluru-based voice AI startup, Arrowhead, raised $3 million, and it plans to scale voice AI for financial services. Tech giants such as Google and Amazon are also investing in voice AI.

Security still a major concern

The security of voice biometrics is estimated to reach $3.61 billion in 2026 and will grow at an average CAGR of approximately 26% per year, so enterprises are making voice authentication a priority, Rajagopalan said. Companies must implement multi-factor authentication, liveness detection, anti-spoofing AI models and encryption of voice data. As deepfake audio threats increase, combining voice with behaviour and device-based signals will be essential for creating trust and resiliency within voice-first ecosystems.

Jain said voice AI has evolved from a convenience feature to a critical defence layer against sophisticated fraud — deepfake attempts have surged over 1,300% in 2024 alone, and this technology is on the frontlines of that battle.

Voice AI can offer multi-layered protection: instant caller verification through voice biometrics, real-time deepfake detection, and proactive threat identification without disrupting user experience. Voice AI tools can integrate with existing security infrastructure — from surveillance systems to access controls — creating unified networks that respond faster than human teams ever could. It's enabling enterprises to scale their security posture without scaling their headcount, he added.

'Industry may work with govt to build strategic reserves for fuel, minerals'

CII calls upon companies to accelerate investments in energy transition, including renewables

GYANENDRA KESHRI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Amid growing concern over disruption in oil and gas supply due to the ongoing West Asia conflict, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has pitched for collaboration between industry and the government for development of strategic reserves and buffer mechanisms for critical raw materials, fuels and intermediate goods.

"Collaborative approaches to stockholding, shared infrastructure and improved data visibility can significantly strengthen national preparedness against future disruptions," CII said in its 12-point industry agenda to deal with geopolitical crises.

It suggested that the companies may strengthen supply-chain resilience by identifying alternative sourcing corridors, diversifying vendor bases and building calibrated inventory buffers for critical inputs. This will reduce exposure to disruptions arising from concentrated maritime routes.

CII observed that the present situation represents a supply-side disruption, with pressures transmitted through energy costs, logistics and working capital cycles.

While the policy response has mitigated immediate risks, the evolving situation requires continued coordination between government and industry, it said.

"The policy approach has correctly focused on maintaining production continuity and supporting viable enterprises. The next phase requires industry to build on this foundation with practical and responsible actions," said CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee.

Supply disruption due to the US-Israel-Iran war has brought the need for expansion of strategic reserves in focus. The government-run Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Ltd (ISPRL) is largely responsible for maintaining the oil reserve in the country.

ISPRL runs three strategic reserve facilities with a combined storage capacity of 5.33 million tonnes. The underground storage facilities include Visakhapatnam (1.33 million tonnes) in Andhra Pradesh, and Mangaluru (1.5 million tonnes) and Padur (2.5 million tonnes) in Karnataka.

To reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels, CII has suggested that the companies should accelerate investments in energy transition, including renewables, green hydrogen and industrial energy efficiency. "The current situation reinforces the need to reduce dependence on conventional fuels and build long-term energy resilience," it said.

Wherever technically and commercially feasible, companies may explore switching from LPG to natural gas and other efficient energy options. This will support cost-optimisation, while contributing to a cleaner energy mix, CII suggested.

Businesses operating institutional kitchens and large food services may adopt innovative approaches to reduce fuel intensity, including the use of electric or bio-based cooking solutions and optimised consumption practices.

CII has also urged companies to maintain price stability by ensuring that the benefits of stable fuel prices and moderated logistics costs are transmitted to end-consumers and downstream partners. This will support inflation management and reinforce industry credibility.

"This is a moment for partnership. The government has created a strong enabling framework. Industry can complement this by ensuring continuity, supporting smaller enterprises and maintaining confidence across the economy. Such a coordinated approach will help India navigate the present situation, while strengthening long-term resilience," said Banerjee.

Foreign investors dump record Rs 1.14 lakh cr

NEW DELHI, PTI: Foreign investors have pulled out Rs 1.14 lakh crore (about $12.3 billion) from domestic equities in March, making it the worst monthly outflow, weighed down by escalating tensions in West Asia, a weakening rupee and concerns over the impact of elevated crude prices on India's growth.

With one trading session still remaining in the month, the outflows could extend further. The previous record for the highest monthly exodus stood at Rs 94,017 crore in October 2024.

With the latest withdrawals, total FPI outflow has reached Rs 1.27 lakh crore in 2026, according to NSDL data.

As per the data, FPIs have remained persistent sellers throughout March, offloading equities worth Rs 1,13,380 crore in the cash market till March 27.

The sharp sell-off follows a strong rebound in February, when foreign FPIs pumped in Rs 22,615 crore, the highest monthly inflow in 17 months.

ROUTES REWRITTEN

Conflict redraws travel map as Indians steer towards new destinations

HRITHIK KIRAN BAGADE
BENGALURU, DHNS

It has been over four weeks since tensions involving the US, Israel, and Iran engulfed West Asia, triggering uncertainty across the global economy, particularly in oil and gas. Alongside this, disruption of regional airspace and critical infrastructure, including airports and key tourism hubs such as Dubai, have dented travel to and through the region. Given the centrality of West Asian hubs in global transit networks, these developments are beginning to reshape travel patterns worldwide, even as demand for holidays remains resilient.

Despite intermittent airspace disruptions, Dubai continues to be a key global hub. However, uncertainty has slowed fresh bookings. "There has been a major reduction in new bookings, down 20-25% after airspace closures became uncertain," says Ravi Gosain, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), noting that Dubai still retains its appeal as a leading leisure destination.

Travellers are not cancelling outright, but postponing plans. Experts view this as a short-term shift rather than structural decline. EaseMyTrip CEO and Co-Founder Rikant Pittie says the sentiment has been impacted, with travellers adopting a wait-and-watch approach. "Demand is more cautious and decision cycles have lengthened, driven by evolving visibility rather than any structural change in travel intent," he explains.

Far away from the conflict

Even as uncertainty persists, the appetite for travel remains strong. Indian travellers are increasingly turning to destinations far away from the conflict zone. Safety, ease of access, connectivity, visa simplicity, and reliability are now taking precedence over price. A MakeMyTrip spokesperson notes that travellers typically adapt rather than cancel, choosing alternate domestic or international destinations instead.

This shift is already visible. Searches and bookings for East and Southeast Asian destinations such as Japan,

A view of Bangkok's Wat Arun temple

Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka have risen. "Short-haul destinations like Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, and Bali have seen 15-20% growth in bookings due to affordability and direct connectivity," says Gosain, adding that Central Asian countries like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are also gaining traction.

India's outbound tourism continues to expand rapidly, with around 3-4 crore Indians travelling abroad annually. Leisure remains the largest segment, accounting for roughly 43.5% of travellers, while total overseas spending is estimated at $30-32 billion. Popular destinations include the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, the US, Singapore, and the UK, with the top-10 destinations accounting for nearly 70% of outbound travel. The sector is projected to cross 50 million outbound travellers by 2030.

While West Asia faces operational volatility, the aviation sector is adapting. Airlines are rerouting via Central Asia, the Caucasus, or Africa to avoid conflict zones. "This has led to a redistribution of travel flows rather than a contraction," says Pattie, adding that hubs such as Singapore and Delhi are emerging as critical bridge points.

Travel platform ixigo is also witnessing a shift in preferences. Vietnam has seen a 130% year-on-year rise in bookings, followed by Nepal (88%), Sri Lanka (68%), Indonesia (33%), Singapore (32%), and Thailand (22%). "Travellers are opting for more accessible and stable destinations," says Aloke Bajpai, Co-founder and Group CEO.

Leisure at home

Domestic travel is benefiting as well. Udaipur has recorded a 69% rise in bookings, followed by Jodhpur (47%), Bagdogra (44%), Srinagar (41%), and Agartala (38%). Goa, Jammu, and Dehradun are also seeing steady growth, reflecting a preference for shorter, predictable trips.

Gosain mentions that while demand for summer travel remains strong, booking behaviour has changed. Travellers are booking closer to departure dates and opting for flexible arrangements, with a clear tilt towards domestic and short-haul destinations. Regions such as Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Kerala, and the Northeast have seen demand rise by 15-20%.

Pricing trends remain uneven. Airfares have fluctuated, with some routes seeing a 5-10% drop in demand, while others have become more expensive due to rerouting. Hotel prices in domestic and short-haul markets have risen by 10-15% due to strong demand and limited supply. Pattie adds that fares on high-demand routes have increased by 10-20%, especially closer to travel dates.

West Asia's role as a major transit hub — facilitating nearly 40% of Asia's travel to the West and Africa — means disruptions are increasing travel times and costs. Long-haul travel has seen a slight dip of 10-15%.

Jamal Younes Kilito, Country Manager (India) for the Moroccan National Tourism Officer, notes that while the impact on Morocco is limited, connectivity challenges could slow growth from eastern markets.

Despite current disruptions, industry sentiment remains optimistic. "The tourism sector has always bounced back from major disruptions," says Gosain, emphasising that current changes are temporary. Pittie echoes this, noting that while travel patterns may shift in the short term, underlying demand remains strong and is likely to stabilise as conditions improve.

TOP PICKS

The data is sourced from Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited

Ipca Laboratories
(ID: IPCALAB)
BUY
Upside +14%**
Last close ₹1,595
Target: ₹1,820*

AU Bank
(ID: AUBANK)
BUY
Upside +42%**
Last close ₹883
Target: ₹1,250*

ICICI Prudential AMC
(ID: ICICIAMC)
BUY
Upside +23%**
Last close ₹2,850
Target: ₹3,500*

Jain Resource Recycling
(ID: JAINREC)
BUY
Upside +13%**
Last close ₹462
Target: ₹520*

TBO Tek
(ID: TBOTEK)
BUY
Upside +23%**
Last close ₹1,105
Target: ₹1,360*

* Target price has been calculated on the basis of fundamentals ** Upside refers to more value stock is expected to generate than its current price

All you need to know about new I-T era

In another two days, India's new income tax legislation, the Income Tax Act, 2025, along with the Income Tax Rules, 2026, will come into force. The new era will impact every taxpayer, whether self-employed, salaried individual, professional, or corporate.

Only tax year, no more confusion

One of the key changes is that it replaces the terms 'Previous Year (PY)' and 'Assessment Year (AY)' with a unified single term 'Tax Year (TY)'. A 'TY' is a period of 12 months commencing from April 1 and ending on March 31 of the following year. In certain cases, there may be fewer than 12 months. For instance, if it is a newly set-up business/a new source of income occurred in January 2026, they will have just three months of the TY and subsequently, full 12 months of the TY. The first TY 2026-27 will start from April 1, 2026, and end on March 31, 2027. This major change will simplify compliance, remove confusion in the minds of taxpayers in differentiating PY and AY, and help in the correct remittance of self-assessment and advance taxes.

The term 'TY' is widely used in other tax jurisdictions. Are there any clashes of 'AY' and 'TY'? No. The reasons are — For the FY2025-26, the AY will be 2026-27 and governed by the 1961 Act and Rules issued thereunder, i.e. income earned during FY2025-26 shall be computed as per old provisions. The income earned during the first TY 2026-27 will be governed by the 2025 Act and Rules issued thereunder. Further, the 2025 Act has retained the term 'FY' for computation, compliance timelines, and other procedural aspects.

Income tax regimes

Both the default new tax and the optional old tax regimes will be available for the taxpayers with certain amendments brought by the Union Budget 2026-27 presented on February 1, 2026. With respect to tax slabs under the default new regime are – Income up to Rs 4 lakh – nil, Rs 4 lakh to Rs 8 lakh – 5%, Rs 8 lakh to Rs 12 lakh – 10%, Rs 12 lakh to Rs 16 lakh – 15%, Rs 16 lakh to Rs 20 lakh – 20%, Rs 20 lakh to Rs 24 lakh – 25%, and above Rs 24 lakh – 30%, plus applicable cess and surcharge.

The tax slabs under the optional old regime applicable for individuals and senior citizens are up to Rs 2.5 lakh – nil, Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 5 lakh – 5%, Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh 20%, and above Rs 10 lakh – 30%.

In the case of a super senior citizen, up to Rs 5 lakh – nil, Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh – 20%, and above Rs 10 lakh – 30%, plus applicable cess and surcharge.

PRABHAKAR K S
FOUNDER & CEO OF SHREE TAX CHAMBERS

Deductions and allowances

A salaried taxpayer or pensioner who opts for the default new tax regime is eligible for a standard deduction of Rs 75,000. A resident individual can avail a rebate of up to Rs 60,000, whose annual taxable income does not exceed Rs 12 lakh. And those taxpayers opting optional old regime are also eligible for a standard deduction of Rs 50,000. A resident individual can avail a rebate of up to Rs 12,500, whose annual taxable income does not exceed Rs 5 lakh.

Apart from these, there are deductions, allowances and tax-free perquisites, to name a few, employer's contribution to NPS, family pension, interest on home loan, children's education allowance, meal vouchers, car, gifts, leave travel and transport allowance, among others. Since the old optional regime's continuation is assured for a few more years, this is the right time to take an appropriate call on whichever regime is suitable for him/her.

ITR filing due dates

The Union Budget 2026-27 has made a slight change to the return filing due dates. Due dates applicable for AY 2026-27 are – In the case of salaried individuals, filing ITR 1/2 remains the same as July 31, 2026. In the case of non-audit businesses and professionals, filing ITR 3/4 – August 31, 2026 (till last year – July 31).

For filing a belated return – December 31, 2026; revised return – March 31, 2027 (till last year – December 31); and updated return for FY2025-26/AY 2026-27 – March 31, 2031. Now, a taxpayer is allowed to update his/her return even after reassessment proceedings have been initiated. By filing an updated return with applicable additional tax over and above, he /she can avoid protracted litigation.

Transitional issues

During this transition period, there are possibilities of overlapping of old and new Rules and also parallel running of two legislations for a couple of years. For interpretation purposes, a TY commencing on or before April 1, 2025, will be deemed to be PY. There will be no repeal effect on the operations carried out before March 31, 2026. The 2025 Act will not affect any right, privilege, obligation, or liability that occurred before March 31, 2026. The proceedings initiated on or after April 1, 2026, in respect of any TY before April 1, 2026, will be carried out as per the repealed provisions. All proceedings pending as of April 1, 2026, before any I-T authorities shall continue and dispose accordingly.

Mcap of 7 of top-10 most-valued firms drops by Rs 1.75 L cr

NEW DELHI, PTI: The combined market valuation of seven of the top-10 most-valued firms tumbled by Rs 1.75 lakh crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with Reliance Industries taking the biggest hit, in tandem with a weak trend in equities.

Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex lost 949.74 points or 1.27%, and the NSE Nifty tanked 294.9 points or 1.27%.

"Markets ended the week on a weaker note, reflecting heightened volatility amid fluctuating global cues and escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia. The week was marked by sharp swings, with early losses driven by concerns over energy supply disruptions, a weakening rupee, which touched a record low, and rising volatility," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

This was followed by a mid-week recovery on hopes of a temporary de-escalation in tensions between the United States of America and Iran, he noted.

"However, renewed selling pressure on Friday erased the gains, dragging indices lower," Mishra added.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries eroded by Rs 89,720.3 crore to Rs 18,24,515.62 crore. HDFC Bank's valuation tanked by Rs 37,248.59 crore to Rs 11,64,018.69 crore. State Bank of India lost Rs 35,399.42 crore from its market valuation, which stood at Rs 9,41,569.15 crore.

The mcap of ICICI Bank dropped by Rs 8,121.76 crore to Rs 8,83,551.30 crore, and that of Bharti Airtel declined by Rs 2,480.42 crore to Rs 10,50,413.33 crore.

Hindustan Unilever's mcap diminished by Rs 2,091.13 crore to Rs 4,87,540.19 crore, and that of Tata Consultancy Services dipped by Rs 271.35 crore to Rs 8,64,668.65 crore.

However, the market valuation of L&T surged by Rs 18,051.68 crore to Rs 4,90,536.19 crore.

The mcap of Bajaj Finance jumped Rs 8,680.36 crore to Rs 5,25,395.48 crore. Infosys added Rs 6,245.3 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 5,15,034.67 crore.

Reliance Industries retained the title of the most-valued firm, followed by HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, TCS, Bajaj Finance, Infosys, Larsen & Toubro and Hindustan Unilever.

How to avoid common motor insurance claim rejections in 2026

Rising number of personal vehicles leading to surge in claims

RAKESH KAUL

Motor vehicles have become an integral part of modern life, and with their growing presence, motor insurance has quickly turned into a must-have safety net for anyone on the road. Whether through comprehensive coverage or the legally-mandated third-party policy, insurance safeguards drivers against unforeseen risks.

Policyholders today can choose between cashless claim settlements, where insurers directly settle bills with network garages, or reimbursement claims, where expenses are repaid after submission of proof. However, with the rising number of personal vehicles, insurers are witnessing an unprecedented surge in claims, many of which face rejection due to avoidable mistakes. As we step into 2026, understanding how to navigate the claims process effectively is more important than ever.

Ensuring a smooth claims process

Notifying the insurance company: After an accident, the first thing you should do is to inform your insurance company right away. Make sure you notify your insurer as soon as possible after the vehicle accident, preferably from the spot of accident. If you wait too long, it can make settling the claim more difficult. You can call the claims helpline of your insurance company or visit their website or mobile app to file the claim. Promptly informing your insurer lets them assess the damage and start the settlement process as soon as possible.

Taking pictures: If you have a smartphone, take pictures of the accident scene. This evidence helps support your claim and shows what happened after the accident. You should also write down details about other vehicles involved, models, and licence plate numbers. This information is important for complete documentation. The pictures and details can be very helpful in showing how much damage was done and proving your case to the insurance company.

Filing an FIR: If you ever get into an accident, you need to file an FIR at the police station on case-to-case basis, mainly for the accident leading to third-party property damages, injuries or even casualties arising out of the accident. An FIR (First Information Report) officially records what happened during accidents, thefts, or fires. For small accidents with little damage, you might not need to file an FIR. However, if there is major damage or if someone else is involved, it is necessary. The FIR creates an official record of the event, which is very important for your insurance claims. It helps establish the facts of what happened, providing a reliable account that your insurance company will need to process your claim.

Submitting documents: This includes taking clear photos of the accident scene, the damage to your vehicle, and any other vehicles involved. Also, collect important documents like your insurance policy, driver's licence, vehicle registration, and any accident reports from the police. Once you have everything, send it all to your insurance company. They will review the evidence and documents to determine how much damage there is and how much compensation you can receive. If your car is badly damaged, taking good photos and sending them along with your other documents will help the insurance company process your claim more quickly.

Breach of policy: It is important to understand that not following the terms and conditions of your insurance policy can result in a breach of policy. For example, if you delay notifying your insurance company about the accident, fail to file an FIR when required, or do not submit the necessary documents, your insurer may reject or reduce your claim. A breach of policy occurs when the insured does not comply with the obligations outlined in the insurance contract, such as driving without a valid licence, using the vehicle for unauthorised purposes, or hiding material facts about the accident. To avoid complications, always adhere to the policy guidelines and promptly fulfill all requirements. This ensures that your claim is processed smoothly and you receive the rightful compensation.

Common mistakes that lead to claim rejections

Insurance claims are often rejected due to several reasons, and being aware of them can help avoid complications. One of the biggest pitfalls is delayed notification, as most insurers require you to inform them within 24-48 hours after an accident, and late intimation can lead to denial. Missing documents such as the insurance policy, driving licence, or FIR also weaken the claim and increase the chances of rejection. Claims may be denied if the Registration Certificate is invalid, expired, or not in your name, and the absence of other papers like the tax certificate, pollution certificate, or fitness certificate can further complicate matters. Errors in the claim form or missing attachments often delay processing and may even result in cancellation.

Insurers usually do not cover consequential losses caused by improper handling of a vehicle, so using towing services, which are normally covered, is a safer option. Providing false information about the accident or damages can lead to outright rejection, while unauthorised repairs carried out before the insurer's inspection or without approval are another common reason for denial.

By following the above steps and understanding the key points of claim settlement, you can handle the aftermath of an accident more effectively. This will help you resolve things smoothly with your insurance company and speed up the process of getting your vehicle repaired or receiving compensation for damages. A smooth claim process gets you back on track faster.

(The writer is Chief Distribution Officer —Retail Business, Bajaj General Insurance Limited)

WEEK AHEAD

Volatility to continue on mixed signals from conflict

Brent crude, at around $110 per barrel, continues to keep inflationary pressures in focus

SIDDHARTHA KHEMKA

Indian equities are expected to remain volatile this truncated week with only three trading sessions. Market sentiment remains sensitive to the mixed signals from the ongoing West Asia conflict. On one hand, the US has extended the deadline for potential strikes on Iran's energy infrastructure, indicating a possible diplomatic window and raising hopes of negotiations, while on the other hand, continued strikes by both sides is keeping risk elevated. Brent crude, at around $110 per barrel, continues to keep inflationary pressures in focus. Currency markets also remain under pressure, with the Indian rupee hitting a record low of around Rs 94.78 against the US dollar last week and currently trading near Rs 94.70. The weakness was further driven by persistent FII outflows (Rs 1.07 lakh crore over the past 17 sessions), weak global cues and fading hopes of a near-term resolution to the conflict, resulting in broad-based selling.

Key events this week
- US retail sales
- US manufacturing PMI data
- US Federal Reserve commentary
- India March GST and auto sales data

Key global events this week include US retail sales, manufacturing PMI data and commentary from Federal Reserve officials, which will provide insights into global growth and policy direction. On the domestic front, investors will track March GST collections and auto sales data for cues on consumption trends and economic activity. With the earnings cycle approaching, quarterly business updates from sectors such as Banks, FMCG, retail and NBFCs will also be closely monitored for demand trends and margin outlook.

Last week was marked by heightened volatility, with markets witnessing sharp swings, as the Nifty50 closed 0.8% lower at 22,820. Broader markets also witnessed mild weakness, as the Nifty Midcap100 fell 0.7% and the Nifty Smallcap250 declined 0.7%, reflecting selective and cautious participation across segments. Sectorally, performance remained mixed, with Nifty IT (+3.4%) emerging as the top gainer, supported by a weaker rupee and selective buying in export-oriented names, followed by Nifty Pharma (+2.1%) on defensive positioning and steady earnings visibility. On the downside, Nifty India Defence (-4.8%) was the worst performer amid profit booking after recent outperformance, while financial services indices declined 2–2.3% on continued FII selling and margin concerns. FMCG (-0.9%), Oil & Gas (-1.3%) and Auto (-0.6%) also edged lower, reflecting demand concerns and pressure from elevated input costs.

In the healthcare space, the recent expiry of Semaglutide's patent in India marks a key inflection point, opening up opportunities for domestic pharmaceutical players. The market is transitioning from an innovator-led to a highly competitive, generic-driven landscape, with multiple companies already launching branded generics. Demand is expected to expand sharply over the next 2–3 years, supported by a large metabolic disease burden and improved affordability. Rising awareness around obesity treatment could also support demand for patented alternatives such as Tirzepatide, shaping the competitive dynamics within the segment.

The capex cycle continues to be supported by a mix of public spending, with states playing a larger role as uncertainties persist. Within this, there is a gradual shift in allocation, with defence and power attracting higher government spending, even as roads and railways moderate from earlier levels. High-frequency indicators suggest that activity remains stable. Private investment is also improving gradually in select sectors. The sustainability of this cycle will depend both on global stability and domestic policy execution.

(The writer is Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited)

DH REVIEW

Nothing Phone (4a): Reliable performer with cool, unique design

ROHIT K V N
BENGALURU, DHNS

Nothing Inc launched the new Phone (4a) series in India earlier this month. It is available in three configurations — 8GB RAM + 128GB storage, 8GB RAM + 256GB storage, and 12GB RAM + 256GB storage — for Rs 31,999, Rs 34,999, and Rs 37,999, respectively.

Design, build quality and display

Like the previous iterations, the Phone (4a) flaunts the trademark see-through design language, featuring a horizontally-aligned triple-camera module and other internal components, which looks refined and visually-pleasing.

The new addition you notice first in the Phone (4a) is the vertically-aligned LED-based Glyph bar on the right side of the camera, which is better than its predecessor in terms of brightness and functionality.

It has nine individually-controllable mini-LEDs, which delivers 40% more brightness than the Phone (3a) series. It is a patented tech, which offers a more natural, neutral, and bleed-free glow.

Also, there is a red LED that blinks brightly, when the camera is in video-recording mode. This lets the person on the other end of the phone know that the camera is on. Besides offering smart notifications, it can double as a fill light for photos and videos.

The device also features the Essential Space key on the right side. When pressed, it opens Essential Space to offer the option to take instant notes. With an AI-based algorithm, it can also generate personalised suggestions, summaries, or action points.

Besides white, the Phone (4a) is also available in blue, pink, and black.

On the front, it sports a 6.78-inch 1.5K (1224 x 2720p) flexible AMOLED display with 10-bit colour depth, supports dynamic refresh rate (30-120Hz), peak brightness of 4,500 nits, and HDR10+ content. It is protected by Corning's Gorilla Glass 7i shield and IP64 rating.

SPEC SHEET

Signature Design + Glyph Upgrade : Transparent design with new LED Glyph bar (40% brighter) for notifications & fill light

Premium Display : 6.78-inch AMOLED, 1.5K resolution, 120Hz refresh rate, 4,500 nits brightness

Performance + Camera : Snapdragon 7s Gen 4, 50MP triple camera, 5,400mAh battery with fast charging

Price: Starts at Rs 31,999

The screen is really good for multimedia consumption and playing graphics-rich games indoors.

It also features dual-SIM slots, a Type-C USB port, stereo speakers and an in-display optical fingerprint sensor. The latter, by the way, works fine with a low false rejection rate.

Performance

Under the hood, the phone houses a 4nm class Qualcomm Snapdragon 7s Gen 4 octa-core with Adreno 810 GPU, Hexagon NPU, AI Engine, and Spectra Image Signal Processor, along with 8GB / 12GB LPDD4X RAM, and 128GB / 256GB UFS 3.1 storage. The apps load faster, GenAI apps run smoothly, and the device can handle graphics-rich games as well.

The user interface of Android 16-based Nothing OS 4.1 is very clean, without any dubious third-party apps or gaming titles as such.

With a 5,400mAh cell capacity, the Phone (4a) can deliver a full day of battery life under normal usage. With a 50W wired charger, it can reach from zero to 100% in under an hour. It also supports 7.5W reverse wired charging.

Photography

The phone boasts of a triple camera module — main 50MP camera (with f/1.88 aperture, OIS: Optical Image Stabilisation), an 8MP 120-degree ultra-wide camera (f/2.2) and a 50MP (with 3.5x periscope telephoto, OIS, 7x lossless zoom, up to 70x ultra zoom) with LED flash on the back. The camera is powered by the TrueLens Engine 4 computational photography system and the Image Super Resolution (ISR) algorithm. It captures Ultra XDR photos with sharp details of the objects in bright sunlight.

Even indoors and in low-lit conditions, it can take pretty neat pictures. The rear camera can record 4K videos at 30 fps. With AI-powered tools, users can remove reflections, erase objects, and more.

On the front, it houses a 32MP (f/2.2) camera, which takes decent selfies in sunlight.

Final thoughts

Most rivals can match the Phone (4a) on specs, such as chipset, camera, and battery, but fall short on design and UI. Its transparent look, clean Android experience, and innovative Glyph Bar features make it a more compelling buy under Rs 40,000.

Tiger Woods

Woods is facing uncertain future after DUI arrest

STUART (USA), AP: Tiger Woods got out of jail and into the passenger seat of a dark SUV, his face as vacant as his mug shot as he was driven away to a future again filled with so much uncertainty.

The next step legally is facing charges of driving while intoxicated, damage to property and refusal to submit to a urine test, which led to him spending eight hours in the Martin County jail some 15 miles from his home on Jupiter Island, Florida on Friday.

His manager at Excel Sports, Mark Steinberg, did not respond to a request for comment on Woods' arrest on Saturday.

As for golf, this comes at a bad time for the sport's most influential player. Woods had said earlier in the week he was trying to get in shape for the Masters on April 9-12, though that was looking unlikely. He turned 50 at the end of last year. "This body, it doesn't recover like it did when it was 24-25," Woods said earlier this week.

He also was days away from a decision on whether to be the next US Ryder Cup captain for the 2027 matches in Ireland.

Praggnanandhaa breaks Anish's defence to begin with a win

Vaishali and Divya settle for draws in contrasting fashion

PAPHOS (CYPRUS), PTI

Indian grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa got off to a flier and crashed through the defenses of Dutch GM Anish Giri in the first round of the Candidates chess tournament here on Sunday.

On a very eventful first day of the tournament, World Cup champion Javokhir Sindarov used his excellent tactical skill to turn the tables on Russian Andrey Esipenko, while pre-event favourite Fabiano Caruana of the United States was close to a victory over fellow American Hikaru Nakamura.

The other game of the eight-player double round-robin tournament is between Matthias Bluebaum of Germany and Wei Yi of China.

In the women's section being played simultaneously, Indian grandmaster and world women's cup champion Divya Deshmukh drew with last-minute replacement Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine and R Vaishali survived some anxious moments before splitting the point with Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan.

India's Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa got off to a flier at the FIDE Candidates tournament by beating Anish Giri of the Netherlands in Cyprus on Sunday. PTI FILE PHOTO

It was in fact all-draw day in the women's event as Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia drew with compatriot Katerya Lagno and all Chinese duel between Jiner Zhu and Zhongyi Tan also ended in a draw.

Praggnanandhaa had been struggling for past few months before the Candidates but has now bounced back in style. Giri is one of the most consistent and solid player in the circuit but on Sunday Praggnanandhaa was simply unstoppable.

It was a battle of nerves as the Indian started off with the Grand Prix attack to counter the Sicilian defense by Giri, who played black.

Whether the opening had its desired effect or not is a matter of debate but what it did for Praggnanandhaa was gave him a lead on the clock.

Giri is not used to surprises and while he was resourceful enough in the early middle game and equalised, Praggnanandhaa won a pawn in the ensuing rook and minor pieces endgame.

Giri, running low on time, blundered to a lost rook and pawns endgame with a pawn less. The rest was easy for Praggnanandhaa.

Results (after round 1): Men: R Praggnanandhaa (Ind) bt Anish Giri (Ned); Javokhir Sindarov (Uzb) bt Andrey Esipenko (Rus); Matthias Bluebaum (Ger) drew with Wei Yi (Chn); Fabiano Caruana (USA) playing Hikaru Nakamura (USA).
Women: Aleksandra Goryachkina (Rus) drew with Kateryna Lagno (Rus); R Vaishali (Ind) drew with Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz); Divya Deshmukh (Ind) drew with Anna Muzychuk (Ukr); Jiner Zhu (Chn) drew with Zhongyi Tan (Chn).

Nikhat, Lovlina lead India's charge

ULAANBAATAR (MONGOLIA), PTI: Indian boxers will aim for a good show at the Asian Championships, beginning here on Monday, as they look to make the most of their opportunities in a packed season and secure direct berths for the multi-sport events later this year.

The women's challenge will be led by Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), two-time world champion Nikhat Zareen (51kg), reigning world champions Minakshi Hooda (48kg) and Jaismine Lamboria (57kg).

The tournament marks the first major outing in a loaded season that includes the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (July-August), the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan (September-October) and the World Boxing Cup Finals in Uzbekistan.

Apart from the medal rush, the championships assume added significance as finalists will earn direct qualification for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games, in line with the Boxing Federation of India's selection policy.

The Indian team has been acclimatising in Mongolia for the past 15 days, training in multinational camps and sparring with boxers from Mongolia, China, Jordan and Thailand.

Teams: Men: Vishwanath Suresh (50kg), Jadumani Singh Mandengbam (55kg), Sachin (60kg), Aditya Pratap Yadav (65kg), Deepak (70kg), Akash (75kg), Ankush (80kg), Lokesh (85kg), Harsh Choudhary (90kg), Narender Berwal (90+kg).
Women: Minakshi (48kg), Nikhat Zareen (51kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Jaismine Lamboria (57kg), Priya (60kg), Ankushita Boro (65kg), Arundhati Choudhary (70kg), Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), Pooja Rani (80kg), Alfiya Tarannum Akram Khan Pathan (80+kg).

Social Butterfly wins HRC Trophy

MUMBAI RESULTS

Social Butterfly, trained by D Todywalla and ridden by P Trevor, won the Hyderabad Race Club Trophy, the feature event of the races on Sunday.

1. The Jockeys Trophy - 1000M: Arbitrage (Aditya Waydande) 1; Moment Of Madness (NS Parmar) 2; Rise The Stars (SG Prasad) 3. WB: 1-3/4, 4/4, 1. TB: Rehanullah Khan. Fav: Arbitrage.
2. Owners' Trophy - 1600M: Rosario (Vivek G) 1; Seneca (A Sandesh) 2; Shirsa (SG Prasad) 3; Tyrannus (Neeraj) 4. Not Run: Ashwa Brazil. WB: 2-1/2, 1-1/4, 1-1/2; TB: P Shroff; Fav: Rosario.
3. Jimmy Bharucha Salver - 1400M: Jaandaar (Vivek G) 1; Havoc (TS Jodha) 2; Pure Soul (P Trevor) 3; Blue Jet (Yash Narredu) 4. Not Run: Taaqath. WB: 2-1/4, 2-1/4, 1-1/4. TB: P Shroff; Fav: Jaandaar.
4. Racing Officials Trophy 1400M: Ashwa Gypsy (SA Amit) 1; Dedication (A Sandesh) 2; Merchant of Venice (R Ajinkya) 3; Tropical Paradise (NS Parmer) 4. WB: 2-1/4, 2-1/4, Ns. TB: Sanjay Kolse; Fav: Interceptor.
5. Dady Adenwalla Trophy - 1200M: Pinnacle (Yash Narredu) 1; Bravion (P Trevor) 2; Size The Grey (Sai Kiran) 3; Asterion (Neeraj) 4. WB: 1/2, 3-3/4, Nk. TB: M Narredu; Fav: Bravion.
6. Hyderabad Race Club Trophy 1200M: Social Butterfly (P Trevor) 1; Fighton (PP Dhebe) 2; Market King (Vivek G) 3; Irish Gold (Neeraj) 4. WB: 4-1/4, 1-1/4, 1-1/4. TB: D Todywalla; Fav: Social Butterfly.
7. Trainers Trophy - 1200M: Undercover (A Sandesh) 1; Foujita (Vivek G) 2; Absolute Gorgeous (P Trevor) 3; Lucio (Aditya Waydande) 4. WB: 4-3/4, Shd, 2-1/4. TB: Faisal A Abbas; Fav: Undercover.
8. Sion F Nessim Plate - 1200M: Aeon Flux (Yash Narredu) 1; Majesticus (Aditya Waydande) 2; Fay (TS Jodha) 3. WB: 1, 2-1/2, 1-1/2. TB: Faisal A Abbas; Fav: Mulan.

Bengaluru dividends
I race: Rs 17 w; 12, 28, 14 p; Fc: Rs 249; Q: Rs 137; Shp: Rs 103; Thp: Rs 36; Tri: Rs 729 & 229; Exp: Rs 3578 & 1812.
II race: Rs 15 w; 20, 15, 27p; Fc: Rs 46; Q: Rs 37; Shp: Rs 32; Thp: Rs 48; Tri: Rs 265 & 195; Exp: Rs 858 & 348.
III race: Rs 16 w; 10, 109, 42 p; Fc: Rs 922; Q: Rs 962; Shp: Rs 502; Thp: Rs 76; Tri: Rs 13448 & 3458; Exp: Rs C/F & 21476.
IV race: Rs 737 w; 89, 14, 36 p; Fc: Rs 5424; Q: Rs 1182; Shp: Rs 47; Thp: Rs 118; Tri: Rs 26,730 & C/F; Exp: Rs C/F & C/F.
V race: Rs 21 w; 11, 10, 32p; Fc: Rs 47; Q: Rs 15; Shp: Rs 34; Thp: Rs 58; Tri: Rs 334 & 272; Exp: Rs 2526 & 1265.
VI race: Rs 18w; 10, 38, 25p; Fc: Rs 176; Q: Rs 110; Shp: Rs 59; Thp: Rs 38; Tri: Rs 1008 & 266; Exp: Rs 4183 & 1493.
VII race: Rs 13 w; 10, 17, 11p; Fc: Rs 52; Q: Rs 47; Shp: Rs 49; Thp: Rs 37; Tri: Rs 75 & 14; Exp: Rs 181 & 95.
VIII race: Rs 62 w; 15, 12, 28p; Fc: Rs 447; Q: Rs 166; Shp: Rs 21; Thp: Rs 42; Tri: Rs 3068; Exp: Rs 350.
Jackpot: Rs. 35,125 & 1893. **I treble:** Rs 1550. **II treble:** Rs 78.

Earth for main event

MUMBAI SELECTIONS

Sanjay Kolse-trained Earth, to be ridden by A Sandesh, is fancied to win Cursetjee Dhunjishaw Salver, the feature event of the races on Monday.
The first race starts at 4.30 pm
1. The Brave Hunter Plate - 1600M: Mighty Hero 1, Flash Mob 2, Royal Champ 3.
2. Western India Race Horse Owners Association Trophy - 2000M: Caccini 1, Looking Like A Wow 2, Youremanorborne 3.
3. The Blue Pencil Plate - 1000M: Lucky Diamond 1, Dream Come Ture 2, Queen Caroline 3.
4. Amber Flash Plate - 1600M: Incredible Luck 1, Golden Eye 2, Shaandaar 3.
5. Cursetjee Dhunjishaw Salver - 1400M: Earth 1, Your Unforgettable 2, Bee Magical 3.
6. The Busy Lizzie Plate - 1100M: American Eagle 1, Key West 2, Rafael 3.
7. The Secret Treasure Plate - 1200M: Neutralist 1, Matisse 2, Storm Cloud 3.
Day's best: Earth. **Jackpot:** 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7. **Treble:** 5, 6 & 7.

F1 JAPANESE GP

Teen Antonelli delivers second straight hit

Italian overtakes Mercedes team-mate Russell for the C'ship lead

SUZUKA (JAPAN), AFP

Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli won the Japanese Grand Prix on Sunday for his second straight victory, as the 19-year-old Italian became the youngest driver in Formula One history to lead the world championship standings.

Antonelli took advantage of a mid-race safety car to leapfrog into the lead after a dreadful start from pole position and led home McLaren's Oscar Piastri by 13.722s with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc a further 1.548s back in third.

He whooped with delight as he crossed the line at Suzuka, telling his team "the pace was unbelievable today".

He moved up to 72 points and leads the championship by nine points after three races, building on the first grand prix win of his career two weeks ago in China.

His Mercedes team-mate George Russell finished fourth to drop to second in the championship standings on 63 points. Leclerc is third on 49.

Russell battled Piastri for the lead over the first half of the race but pitted just before the safety car which dropped him out of contention for the win.

Piastri secured second in his first grand prix start of the season, after crashing on his way to the grid in the opener in Australia and missing the race in China because of a technical problem.

Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli celebrates with the trophy after winning the Japanese Grand Prix on Sunday. REUTERS

Piastri led for the first half of the race before the safety car gave Antonelli his chance.

McLaren's world champion Lando Norris was fifth ahead of Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Alpine's Pierre Gasly.

Red Bull's four-time world champion Max Verstappen, the winner in Japan for the past four years, was eighth after starting from 11th on the grid.

Antonelli had become the youngest pole-sitter in F1 history in China and again was at the head of the grid.

But he suffered a shocking start and was down in sixth by the first corner. Piastri took the early lead ahead of Leclerc, with Norris, Russell and Hamilton all sweeping past Antonelli.

The young Italian had made up some of the last ground when a crash by Haas driver Ollie Bearman brought out the safety car during the pit stop window. Piastri had already pitted but Antonelli was able to dive in for fresh tyres moments after the safety car was deployed and emerged in front of the Australian, a stroke of luck that effectively won him the race.

Bearman got out of his car unaided but was limping badly as race marshals helped him off the track. Haas later said he had "a right knee contusion" and initial X-rays showed no fractures after hitting the barrier at high speed.

Formula One now takes an extended break until the Miami Grand Prix on May 3.

The Bahrain and Saudi Arabia races scheduled for April have been cancelled because of the war in West Asia.

Sabalenka wins Sunshine Double

Belarusian slays Gauff to underline her dominance

MIAMI, AFP

Aryna Sabalenka won her second straight Miami Open title on Sunday, beating Coco Gauff 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 to complete a "Sunshine Double" Indian Wells-Miami sweep.

The world number one from Belarus, fresh off her first triumph in the California desert, became the fifth woman -- and the first since Iga Swiatek in 2022 -- to win both of the elite early-season hardcourt WTA 1000 titles.

"It means a lot," Sabalenka said after joining Poland's Swiatek, German great Steffi Graf, Belgian Kim Clijsters and fellow Belarusian Victoria Azarenka on the list of women to win both titles in the same year.

"My goal always been to put my name in the history, and I just did it."

Sabalenka underscored her WTA dominance in a season in which her only defeat to date was her Australian Open finals loss to Elena Rybakina, whom she went on to beat in the Indian Wells title match and in the semi-finals here.

She handed Gauff her first career defeat in a hardcourt final. The American had won her first nine, including a triumph over Sabalenka in the 2023 US Open championship match.

Gauff had also beaten the Belarusian for the title on the red clay of Roland Garros last year. So Sabalenka said she wasn't surprised to see Gauff dig in, even after the Belarusian pocketed the first set with a ruthless display of power and precision.

She broke Gauff to open the match and, after Gauff saved three break points in a gritty fifth game, broke the American again in the seventh before serving it out in 37 minutes without facing a break point herself.

In a tense second set, Gauff's first break point chance -- from a blistering backhand passing winner in the second game -- sparked a jubilant reaction from the crowd at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins that is just about an hour away from Gauff's Delray Beach home.

But Gauff couldn't convert, slamming a forehand into the net on the next point as Sabalenka held.

Aryna Sabalenka poses with the trophy and her dog Ash after winning the Miami Open in Florida on Saturday. AFP

Mysuru B secure win over Hassan

BENGALURU, DHNS: Renish's 23-point contribution for Mysuru B put Dishanth's 35-point haul for Hassan in the shadow as the former secured a 76-75 victory over the latter in their boys' league game of the State Junior Boys and Girls Basketball Championship for the DN Rajanna Trophy at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium here on Sunday.

LOCAL BASKETBALL

Results (league matches): Boys: Hassan: 42 (Kiran 21, Dishanth 15) bt Bangalore South: 33 (Sacheth 11, Niranjan 8). HT: 28-21; Kolar: 76 (Gagan 25) bt Bagalkot: 26 (Nandish 11). HT: 47-19; Davanagere: 49 (Samarath Gowda 17, Harshil 14) bt Bellary: 44 (Nitin 19). HT: 30-25; Mysuru B: 75 (Renish 23, Achutha 15) bt Hassan: 56 (Dishanth 35, Kiran 11). HT: 34-37; Dharwad A: 94 (Ramesh 22) bt Bellary: 8. HT: 61-6.
Girls: Vijayapura: 56 bt Bangalore South: 4. HT: 35-2; Dharwad B: 36 (Samruddhi 10) bt Kolar: 18 (Jayashree 11). HT: 26-3; Dharwad A: 35 (Aishwarya 12, Amruta 11) bt Bangalore South: 6. HT: 21-4.

Indian football team yet to enter Kochi's stadium

ADITYA K HALDER
BENGALURU, DHNS

The Indian football team is yet to enter the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Kochi with less than 48 hours to go for their match against Hong Kong as they await clearance of venue dues by the organisers, Kerala Football Association.

The Indian team wasn't allowed to train at the stadium on Thursday as well, with the Greater Cochin Development Authority (GCDA) threatening that they will cancel the contract for the match if the dues (Rs 3 lakh rent fee and Rs 25 lakh security deposit) are not cleared by Monday, which is a day before the match.

The matchday minus 1 is also crucial before the game itself as the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) mandates the venue must also come under the control of the hosts by this time while events such as pre-match press conferences and training sessions largely take place at the venue.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) earlier released a statement on Saturday assuring that the match will go ahead as planned and it is in constant coordination with KFA to resolve the situation.

As far as the team's training is concerned, a source said arrangements were made for both teams with the Indian team practicing at the ISL club Kerala Blasters training ground, The Sanctuary, while the visitors were provided another facility nearby.

Tickets for the match continue to be sold on AIFF's official partner's app from Rs 199 onwards while the East Gallery is already sold out.

The situation came into the spotlight last Thursday when India's head coach Khalid Jamil and three Indian players, including Bengaluru FC's Ashique Kuruniyan **(in pic)**, weren't allowed access to the venue when they arrived for a press conference organised by KFA. The event was then called off.

AIFF takes cautious stance over ISL bidding rights

ADITYA K HALDER
BENGALURU, DHNS

The All India Football Federation's Executive Committee took a cautious stance on the two bids for the 20-year commercial rights of the Indian Super League package as it wants to study both the bids before declaring the winner.

Following the ExCo meeting, chaired by Kalyan Chaubey, at the AIFF headquarters in New Delhi, the body directed KMPG, the firm that manages the monetisation and tender process for its commercial rights, to prepare a report that compares and evaluates the bids.

The body confirmed the same through a statement.

"After detailed deliberations, the Executive Committee decided that KPMG will prepare comprehensive comparison tables to evaluate the feasibility, financial structure and key technical aspects of the bids," the AIFF said in a statement. As reported earlier, Genius Sports offered the biggest bid followed by FanCode.

Fitzpatrick pulls off a coup

GURUGRAM, PTI

Alex Fitzpatrick started the final day four shots behind leader and defending champion Eugenio Chacarra, but the former entered the 18th green with a four-shot lead to win his maiden DP World Tour title at the Hero Indian Open here on Sunday.

Fitzpatrick double-bogeyed in the final hole, but he already had done enough to grab the trophy by two shots. Fitzpatrick shot 3-under 69 to total 9-under for the week with rounds of 70-68-72-69, while Chacarra had a nightmarish final day with six bogeys, four of them on the back nine and he dropped shots on three of his last four holes. With rounds of 67-69-75 he finished at 7-under after starting the final day at 10-under.

England's Fitzpatrick and Chacarra have a long rivalry going back to their amateur days.

In 2022, Fitzpatrick turned pro three weeks before Chacarra became a pro with the LIV Golf, which he quit at the end of 2024.

A year ago, when Chacarra won the Hero Indian Open 2025, Fitzpatrick was tied-17th.

Fitzpatrick received the Trophy from Dr Pawan Munjal, Executive Director, Hero MotoCorp, and a cheque of $433,500.

He also earned 585 points and moved to sixth place on the Race to Dubai rankings.

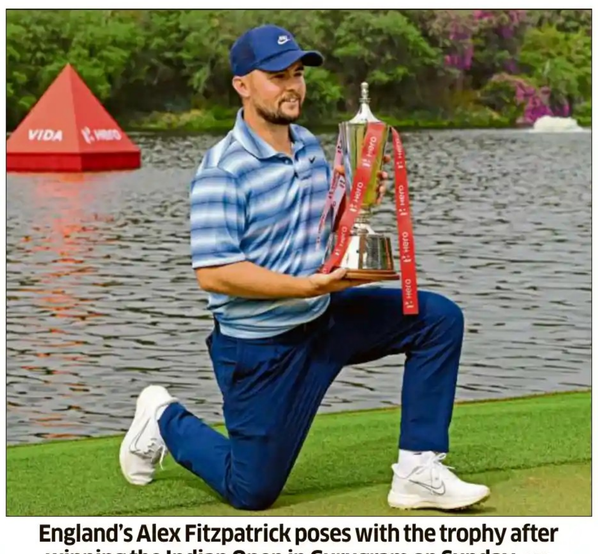
If Fitzpatrick finishes in the top-10 of R2D he could receive a PGA Tour card and join his elder brother, Mathew, in the United States.

The younger Fitzpatrick's win came exactly a week after his elder and more famous brother, Matthew won the Valspar Championship on the PGA Tour.

Manoj best Indian

Bengaluru's 17-year-old golfer S Manoj scored a final round four-over 76 to finish tied-43rd and share the best-placed Indian honours along with the seasoned pro Om Prakash Chouhan.

Making his maiden appearence at the event, Manoj, who turned professional last year, had returned cards of 76-70-76 in the first-three rounds before his fourth round 76 to end at 10-over 298.



England's Alex Fitzpatrick poses with the trophy after winning the Indian Open in Gurugram on Sunday. AFP

Indians shine in World Wushu Championship

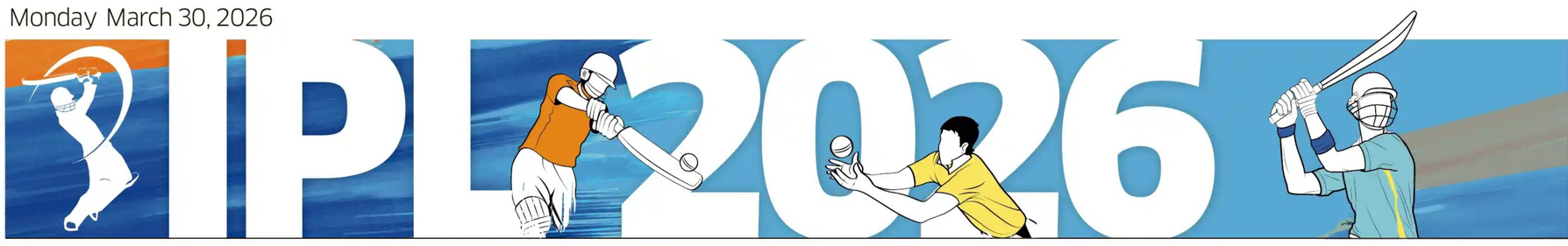
TIANJIN (CHINA), PTI: Indian athletes secured two bronze medals while four others moved to the finals in different categories at the 10th World Wushu Championship here on Sunday.

In the semifinal matches, India's Anu faced a tough contest against China's Zhang Lining but lost the bout, earning a bronze medal in the girls section while in the boys' semifinal, Goutam Mankas was defeated by his opponent to secure another bronze.

Furthermore, four Indian players registered victories to enter the finals.

Upendro Thougam defeated Ahmed Mohamed of Egypt to reach the final, while Pama Heiba Singh beat Alimou Sy of Senegal to secure a place in the title clash.

Yuvraj defeated Xiviel Bantali of the Philippines to enter the final , while Victor overcame Said Karim Mohamed of Egypt to progress to the summit clash.



10 TEAMS 13 VENUES 58 DAYS 74 MATCHES

"It's always important to start well, especially at home. We've had our struggles here over the last couple of years, so it was important to win and make sure this place feels difficult for any opposition coming in.

DEVDUTT PADIKKAL

Riyan Parag

'Riyan's maturity & vision landed him captaincy'

GUWAHATI, PTI: Riyan Parag maturity and vision for the side made him the perfect candidate for captaincy ahead of five others, including veteran Ravindra Jadeja, Rajasthan Royals head coach and Director of Cricket, Kumar Sangakkara said ahead of team's opening game against Chennai Super Kings here on Monday.

RR named Assam man Parag as the skipper for this IPL season ahead of many senior players, raising a lot of eyebrows especially after the franchise had won only two of the eight games that he had captained last year. Sangakarra explained the reason behind the decision.

"There were five candidates, including Sandeep Sharma and Ravindra Jadeja. We had very strict parameters as how we are going to choose, what is the process, so we had lots of conversations with all candidates and we realised all are very capable of captaining our side. Riyan came across as the top candidate because in all his conversations he seemed to have matured a lot," Sangakkara said.

"He was very reflective in answering all the questions and the questions were very tough, targeted questions. Some of those questions were quite uncomfortable for all of them. Riyan with his maturity, what is vision for the side, he wanted not just to captain but to lead the team, it made him the leading candidate.

"We went with an open mind and gave due respect to all the players, gave all an equal chance and picked the best candidate."

Rickelton & Rohit run riot

Openers smash blistering fifties to power MI to 6-wkt win over KKR

MUMBAI, PTI

Mumbai Indians rode on blistering half-centuries from former skipper Rohit Sharma (78) and Ryan Rickelton (81) to comfortably beat Kolkata Knight Riders by six wickets thus breaking the hoodoo of not winning any of their opening games in last 13 editions of the IPL, here on Sunday.

While they had lost each of their first matches of an IPL edition since beating Chennai Super Kings by eight wickets in 2012, five-time winners Mumbai Indians hit full throttle in their chase of 221, replying with 224/4 in 19.1 overs.

Playing his first T20 game since last IPL, former India and Mumbai Indians captain Rohit appeared to have sharpened his game a few notches as he smacked a 38-ball 78 with six sixes and as many fours.

At the other end, Ryan Rickelton made a belligerent 81 off 43 balls with eight sixes and four fours while making the most of two lifelines, helping Mumbai Indians finally collect those elusive two points from the first game.

Rohit was adroit in not just picking the lengths of the ball early or with his movement at the crease, but with some of the shots that he executed to perfection.

Ryan Rickelton (left) scored a 43-ball 81 while Rohit Sharma added a quickfire 38-ball 78 to steer Mumbai Indians past Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday. AFP/ PTI

Like against the lanky Blessing Muzarabani, the 38-year-old danced down the track to spank a short ball over extra cover for a six in the fourth over, or when he timed the ball as sweetly as it could be against Varun Chakravarthy to send it sailing over the cover for another six in the next.

And those quintessential Rohit's hits over cover were on display too, one of which was unleashed effortlessly against Kartik Tyagi in the sixth as Rohit completed his half-century off a mere 23 balls.

At the other end, Rickelton blissfully took down KKR's mystery spin duo of Sunil Narine and Chakravarthy, targetting the leg-side boundaries.

Rohit and Rickelton put on 148 off 72 balls to put MI in the driver's seat before falling to Anukul Roy's brilliance in the outfield. It was the fifth-wicket pair of Hardik Pandya (18 not out) and Naman Dhir (5 not out) that took MI over the line.

Earlier, skipper Ajinkya Rahane (67) and Angkrish Raghuvanshi (51) struck vital half-centuries but Kolkata Knight Riders posted a par score of 220 for 4.

On a placid wicket, Shardul Thakur (3/39) provided Mumbai crucial breakthroughs as their bowlers could not really impose themselves in their maiden outing.

SCOREBOARD

Kolkata Knight Riders: Ajinkya Rahane c Pandya b Thakur 67, Finn Allen c Tilak b Thakur 37, Cameron Green c Rutherford b Thakur 18, Angkrish Raghuvanshi c Tilak b Pandya 51, Rinku Singh (not out) 33, Ramandeep Singh (not out) 4. Extras (LB-2, NB-1, W-7) 10. **TOTAL (for 4 wkts, 20 overs) 220.**

Fall of wickets: 1-69, 2-109, 3-145, 4-205.

Bowling: Trent Boult 4-0-38-0, Hardik Pandya 3-0-39-1, AM Ghazanfar 4-0-51-0, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-35-0, Shardul Thakur 4-0-39-3, Mayank Markande 1-0-16-0.

Mumbai Indians: Ryan Rickelton (run out) 81, Rohit Sharma c Roy b Arora 78, Suryakumar Yadav c Singh b Tyagi 16, Tilak Varma c sub (MK Pandey) b Narine 20, Hardik Pandya (not out) 18, Naman Dhir (not out) 5. Extras (LB-2, NB-1, W-3) 6. **TOTAL (for 4 wkts in 19.1 overs) 224.**

Fall of wickets: 1-148, 2-179, 3-184, 4-215.

Bowling: Vaibhav Arora 4-0-52-1, Blessing Muzarabani 3-0-34-0, Varun Chakravarthy 4-0-48-0, Kartik Tyagi 4-0-43-1, Sunil Narine 3-0-30-1, Anukul Roy 1.1-0-15-0.

Result: Mumbai Indians won by 6 wkts.

PoM: Shardul Thakur.

Samson, Jadeja set for emotional showdown

CSK, RR look to rebound from bad seasons

GUWAHATI, PTI

Sanju Samson is set for an emotional clash against Rajasthan Royals, the side he led and shaped for over a decade, as he turns out for Chennai Super Kings, while Ravindra Jadeja will also face his former franchise, adding a poignant sub-plot to the IPL match between the two teams here on Monday.

For more than a decade, Samson was synonymous with RR, their batting mainstay, leader and all-time leading run-scorer who guided them to the 2022 final.

Much like MS Dhoni at CSK, Samson was the Royals' identity, but in a blockbuster swap that sent Jadeja back to RR, the Kerala batter now finds himself in yellow, adding a new dimension to CSK's evolving core.

Samson also arrives in prime form, having played a decisive role in India's triumphant T20 World Cup campaign. His hat-trick of 50-plus scores in must-win games against West Indies, England and New Zealand has made him the star of the nation as the unassuming keeper-batter will come with a renewed self-belief.

Sanju Samson, who shaped Rajasthan Royals, will face them in his first match for Chennai Super Kings.

LIVE 7:30 PM

He along with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, who are set to open also, will also form the core leadership of the team who will miss Dhoni for at least two weeks due to a calf strain.

Dhoni has not travelled with the side to Guwahati as his absence will put Samson and Gaikwad in the spotlight.

Dhoni's absence will also open the door for emerging names like 20-year-old left-arm spin all-rounder Prashant Veer who impressed in domestic T20s and the franchise's big-money (Rs 14.2-core) uncapped recruit Kartik Sharma, known for his six-hitting exploits in the domestic circuit.

With Dewald Brevis showing signs of maturity, Shivam Dube growing into a dependable middle-order force, and youngster Ayush Mhatre developing rapidly, CSK appear better equipped for a rebuild.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli kick-started the season with a superb unbeaten 69 against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday. DH PHOTO/ PUSHKAR V

King Kohli still at peak of his powers

RCB veteran showed his undying hunger with a brilliant knock against SRH

SIDNEY KIRAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

Virat Kohli is a bona fide legend of the sport but deep inside even he would have known this IPL could possibly be the most challenging in his illustrious career. Having retired internationally from Tests and T20Is, this was his first full IPL since deciding last May to cut down his playing time considerably.

Once one of the busiest cricketers on the planet who could effortlessly switch between formats like swapping jerseys, the 37-year-old Kohli joined Royal Challengers Bengaluru's camp here last week having previously played a competitive game against New Zealand in January.

Since that ODI series versus the Kiwis where he looked in great touch, scoring 93, 23 and a record-extending 54th ODI century (124), Kohli had spent most of his time in London – his new residence. Although the veteran kept himself supremely fit, like he always does, and stayed in tune with the game through practice sessions, the lack of game time was a concern coming into the IPL which is by far one of the most competitive T20 leagues in the world.

In fact, even RCB head coach Andy Flower was asked whether there could be any rustiness in Kohli's game on the eve of the game against Sunrisers Hyderabad but the Zimbabwean replied saying the King still "looked at the peak of his powers".

Flower's statements held true in the season-opening game against SRH at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday where Kohli showed no ring-rust whatsoever in anchoring the defending champions to a rousing six-wicket win with a typically methodical 38-ball 69 not out (5x4, 5x6).

Initially when the young Devdutt Padikkal was going all guns blazing in pursuit of a 202-run target, Kohli bided his time. He relied mostly on singles with the odd boundary; happy to give Padikkal much of the strike. But when Padikkal departed in the ninth over, the demon inside Kohli awoke.

Known to have one of the best wrists in the business, Kohli showed the power is still very much intact when he flicked Harshal Patel for a flat six – the ball speeding into the stands like a 'tracer bullet'. He even charged down the track and cracked left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey for a six – something which he rarely does.

Then came the final flourish from Kohli in the 16th over when he smashed Harshal for a 6, 4, 4 and 4 to seal a thumping win for the Royal Challengers, the chase master kicking off his campaign in just the way he envisioned.

"It was good to get back out there. The last game I played was the final last year but I think the way I batted in the one-day series (vs New Zealand) quite recently really helped me to stay in that same kind of momentum," said Kohli post-match.

"I wasn't playing shots that I don't usually play so I knew as long as I have the rhythm and I've put enough work physically behind the scenes with my fitness, things should come together nicely and tonight was another chance to start strong and to build on this."

Kohli also said the increased downtime helps him stay refreshed. "The kind of scheduling that we've had over the last 15 years and the amount of cricket I've played, for me there was always a risk of getting burnt out rather than being undercooked.

"So these breaks helped me immensely. I stay fresh, I stay excited. Whenever I come back to play, it's 120%. I'm not coming back underprepared. In fact, the extra rest helps me to mentally freshen up.

"And as long as you're physically fit and you're excited mentally, all those things come together nicely and then you're able to contribute for the team's cause and that's what you want to do as a player. You don't want to hold on to a spot. You want to keep performing and keep putting in the work for the team," Kohli added.

Blow for CSK as Brevis is ruled out

GUWAHATI, PTI: If Mahendra Singh Dhoni's calf muscle injury wasn't enough, Chennai Super Kings have been dealt a second telling blow in the form of Dewald Brevis' side strain which will keep him out for the first few games, head coach Stephen Fleming confirmed here on Sunday.

Dewald Brevis

CSK will face Rajasthan Royals here on Monday in their opening IPL game.

"Brevis is out. He had a side injury during training. So again, he is rehabbing," Fleming said when a specific question related to Brevis' injury was put forth.

The CSK had already announced that Dhoni will be out for at least two weeks if not more due to a calf muscle strain but Fleming said the former skipper will still be heavily involved in planning.

"It would be a game without him. But his influence is still very strong," he said.

Mary Kom considers move into pro boxing

NEW DELHI, PTI: Olympic bronze medallist and six-time world champion Indian boxer MC Mary Kom on Sunday said she is considering a move into professional boxing.

The 43-year-old boxer, who became the first Indian woman boxer with an Olympic medal when she won bronze in the 2012 London Games, is past the age eligibility to compete on the amateur circuit.

"What can I say about the high points? Winning six World Championships was incredible. Although I reached a stage where age restrictions prevented me from competing further in amateur boxing for the country, a new opportunity has surfaced in Professional Boxing," she said on Sunday.

"I am currently taking some time to consider it. I am working hard and trying to make a comeback to show people what I can still do.

Widely considered one of the greatest amateur boxers, Mary Kom also underlined her commitment to grassroots development through her academy in Manipur.

◆ ON TV ◆

CRICKET

IPL: RR vs CSK **(7:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Star Sports Network, JioHostar.**

FOOTBALL

Friendlies: Azerbaijan vs Sierra Leone **(8:30 pm)**, Cyprus vs Moldova **(9:30 pm)**, Germany vs Ghana **(12:15 am, Tuesday)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network, SonyLIV.**

'Excited' Buttler rejuvenated for IPL

NEW DELHI, AFP

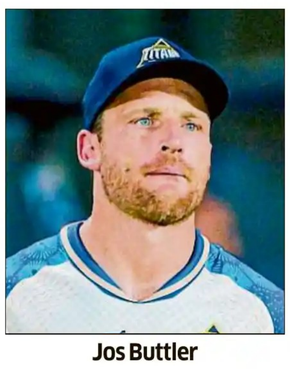
England's Jos Buttler insists he still has the hunger for runs, saying a complete break from cricket in the Alps has rejuvenated him for the Indian Premier League after a horror T20 World Cup.

The wicketkeeper cut a downcast figure opening the England batting in the global showpiece, scoring just 87 runs in eight matches up to the semifinal defeat to eventual champions India this month.

"It's great to have a nice break," Buttler, whose Gujarat Titans team will begin their campaign against Punjab Kings in New Chandigarh on on Tuesday, said.

"I actually went to the Alps so I couldn't have been further away from cricket which was really nice.

"Had some time away and I'm really excited now, looking forward to another IPL season," added the former England white-ball captain.



Jos Buttler

Opener Buttler, who has scored 4,037 T20 runs for England since his 2011 debut, was a shadow of his usually destructive self in the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

Buttler's top score was a less-than-fluent 26 against Nepal in England's opening match.

He hit a scratchy 21 against the West Indies in the next group game then had a run of five single-digit scores before scoring 25 in the semifinal defeat.

Buttler's slump in form has left a question mark over his future in Harry Brook's England side, but the 35-year-old said he retained his motivation for the game.

"I'm still hungry to score runs," said Buttler.

"I think I'm at a stage in my career now and having just had those few weeks to reflect, I just want to look forward and play what's in front of me and not make any plans really.

"Whether you're playing well in terms of runs or not scoring runs... you have to have the same energy and motivation to go to practise and to the next match.

"As long as I've got that energy to turn up to the next one, I'll keep going," he said.

Buttler has made just one half-century in his last four International Cricket Council white-ball tournaments.

But is looking to regain his form in the IPL, where he has been one of the most successful overseas batsmen.

Back-up act Duffy delivers on debut

SIDNEY KIRAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

When Royal Challengers Bengaluru procured Jacob Duffy during the mini auction last year for Rs 2 crore, the New Zealand fast bowler seemingly knew he was picked up as a back-up for his Australian counterpart Josh Hazlewood.

As luck would have it, the 31-year-old Duffy got a chance to finally make his IPL debut against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday as Hazlewood -- RCB's wrecker-in-chief -- continues his recovery from an Achilles and hamstring injury.

Having waited patiently for half a decade to compete in the biggest T20 league in the world, the six-foot seamer gave an early indication on why New Zealanders rate him so highly with a smashing performance on debut. Bowling all his four overs on the bounce at the start, Duffy sizzled with a spell of 3/22 to lay siege to Sunrisers' top-order.

RCB's Jacob Duffy sparkled on his IPL debut, bagging 3/22 against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday in Bengaluru. PTI

At the beginning, the Southland native was quick to assess the conditions at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, which was hosting a high-profile game after 10 months. Making the most of the spongy bounce on offer early on, he employed the short stuff judiciously to constantly trouble openers Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma. In fact, all of his three wickets came via the short stuff.

Duffy, who has bagged 62 wickets in 48 T20Is for New Zealand since making his international debut in December 2020, showed he can move the ball too with both Abhishek and Head playing and missing on a couple of occasions.

Soon after his four-over spell, Duffy was substituted with Devdutt Padikkal under the Impact Player rule but his impact was so big, he was adjudged the Player of the Match.

Delighted with his debut, Duffy said he was just focussed on replicating what Hazlewood had done for RCB. "Awesome, hell of a way to start the campaign. Great win. I am just keeping the big fellow's (Hazlewood) seat warm. I just wanted to bowl the hard lengths, just keep the ball there. Even better that I got to walk off the field after seven overs.

"We talked about the lengths and stuff, what works here. Just build on what Josh did. When the ball is hard and new is the best time to bowl on this surface," he added.

RCB skipper Rajat Patidar praised Duffy for repaying the confidence the management has on him. "Duffy was playing his first game and the way he played and the wickets he took were the turning point. Duffy, I think he is a specialist T20 bowler right now and we have a lot of confidence in him."

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